LONDON LAVENDER

·E·V·LUCAS·

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FICT

Gertrude King

to

New York -

1913 ——

Madeleine King

LONDON LAVENDER

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
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TORONTO

LONDON LAVENDER

AN ENTERTAINMENT

BY

E. V. LUCAS

AUTHOR OF "OVER BEMERTON'S,"
"MR. INGLESIDE," ETC.

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1912

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A CHOICE OF MOTTOES

". . . across the field of vision . . ." — *Optician's Catalogue.*

"Nothing doing." — *Stock Exchange Bulletin.*

"It is almost impossible to exclude truth altogether."
— *Observer's Corner.*

"The mixture as before." — *Dr. William Osler.*

NOTE

TRY as I might to prevent it, certain characters from *Listener's Lure*, *Mr. Ingleside*, and particularly *Over Bemerton's*, would keep breaking into this book.

I have to thank Mr. Cecil Sharp for permission to reproduce the music on pages 26, 27, and 276. That on pages 143 and 144, also due to his courtesy, is now published for the first time.

E. V. L.

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DABNEY, Mr. A London editor.
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"DIRECTOR, The." A folk-song enthusiast.
DRAX, Martha. An inmate of the Pink Almshouses.
DUCKIE, John. A waiter.
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FALCONER, Kent. The narrator of this story.
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CHAPTER I

IN WHICH A NEW HOME IS FOUND AND THE STATUS OF ANTHROPOID APES IS CAREFULLY DETERMINED

HAVING once decided — very much against my will (such as it is) — to leave my old single rooms at Mrs. Duckie's, the question where to live was before us. Far enough away to make a good walk in fine weather, was a point on which Naomi insisted first of all, and, indeed, it was because Mrs. Duckie's house was too near Queen Anne's Gate that her hostility to it was so firm.

"It's no nearer than it was before we were married," I pointed out. "In fact, just the same distance."

"Yes," said Naomi, "and look how you suffered for want of exercise." (Did I?) "No, we must live farther away from it all. That's absolutely necessary."

By "it" she meant her father's house in particular; Pall Mall; and an area bounded by the Haymarket Theatre in the South, Kreisler and Casals in the North, and Bond Street in the West; but we were to be not so far as to be more than one and tenpence

(the frugal young woman's limit, with twopence for the blackguard chauffeur) in a taxi; we were to have contiguity to an open space; nice rooms; and a comfortable landlady who could cook. For we agreed that we wanted no oven responsibilities of our own, although a chafing dish was to fortify the menu on occasion.

These were not very exacting conditions, and at 7 Primrose Terrace, close to Regent's Park, we found as complete an approximation as this vale of tears and disappointment is equal to offering, the rooms being large and just vacated by an old occupant with a very high standard of comfort: a self-protective gentleman of means whom the gods had, mercifully for us, visited with a nervous breakdown, making two years' travel in warmer climes an obligation. As that sententious amateur, Herbert Trist, says, "The art of life is to succeed a good tenant."

Our landlady is a twin — two sisters, the Misses Laura and Emma Packer, unmarried, very refined, fragile, and Victorian, who are assisted in the duties of the house by a worthy rotund woman named Mrs. Wiles. One of my earliest proceedings after becoming the tenant having been to take the steps necessary for election to a fellowship of the Zoological Society of London, you may judge of my satisfaction to learn that Mrs. Wiles' husband was no other than the head keeper of the ape house. Here was a friend at court who had it in his power to make even the Zoo more agreeable.

But, once again to prevent misunderstanding, let me remark that when we say ape — Mrs. Wiles and I — we mean ape and ape only. For there are, it seems, persons so lost to nice feelings and etymological exactitude that they speak of apes and monkeys indiscriminately as though they were the same, whereas, of course, monkeys are only monkeys — gibbering unreticent shameless travesties of the worst kind of man — while apes are without tails, and have a certain patient dignity, and lay serious claim to the attention of the theorizing biologist.

"No," said Mrs. Wiles, "not monkeys. Not Wiles. I don't say as how I am overjoiced when I meet a lady, as it might be Mrs. Johnson last evening, and after she has asked me what my husband does and I've told her he's an official in the employ of the Zoological Society, she says, 'Oh, a keeper, I suppose'; and when I say, severe like, 'A head keeper,' she says, as they all do, the same two things, sometimes one first and sometimes the other, but always the same — 'Oh, I hope it's not the monkey house,' and 'Could you possibly give me two tickets for next Sunday afternoon?'"

Mrs. Wiles now and then stops for breath, although, like most Londoners, she talks without apparently using any, and this, on our first exchange of confidences on the matter, enabled me to ask why she thought the monkey-house query was always propounded.

"I don't know," she said, "but I suppose it's be-

cause to most people the Zoo is monkeys first and foremost. It's the monkeys they want to see. But Wiles has nothing to do with monkeys, nothing whatever. Wiles has charge of the apes. I won't go so far as to say I don't sometimes wish it was lions or elephants, but this I will say, that, good husband as Wiles is, I don't think I could live with him if it was monkeys pure and simple — although how anyone can call them pure and simple, I can't think. Apes are different, aren't they, sir? Wiles says that apes are the next things to us. Wiles says they have brains and beautiful natures; but what gives me most peace of mind is knowing that they haven't got tails. Tails would be too much, as I often tell him. I've got a bit of writing about it which Wiles found in a dictionary, and if you'll permit me, sir, I'll bring it round and show it to you to-morrow morning. I always keep it in the Bible, handy."

Mrs. Wiles unfolded it the next morning and I read aloud these words: "In common use the word ape extends to all the tribe of monkeys and baboons, but in the zoological sense" ("Ah!" said Mrs. Wiles, smoothing her apron) "it is restricted to those higher organized species of the Linnæan genus *Simia*, which are destitute of a tail, as the ourangs, chimpanzees, and gibbons."

"There!" she said triumphantly, when I had finished.

Our opportunities for conversation with Mrs. Wiles come after breakfast, for it is one of her duties to clear away. Wiles and she appear to live close by,

and she moves between the two houses, first getting Wiles his breakfast, packing him off to his apes, and "redding up" her own home; then locking her door and "redding up" the Misses Packers'; then returning to prepare Wiles's and her own dinner; and in the late afternoon returning to the Misses Packers' to help them with theirs and ours. Wonderful creatures, women! There is nothing done by men to put in the balance against such steady undeviating dreary mule-work as women cheerfully perform. At least, not in England. On the Continent you get something like it, in the small hotels where a man does everything; but not here — not in the land of public-houses.

The Misses Packer, our tutelary twins, although aware that in Mrs. Wiles they have a treasure, deprecate her volubility in our rooms. Like all consciously refined persons, they have no appreciation of character, and both Miss Laura and Miss Emma have separately apologized to us for their hireling's familiarity and hoped we will not allow her to impose upon our good nature. What is to be done with people like this? — and they are everywhere.

Miss Laura (who claims to be the older by half an hour, and has will power to justify the claim), although she has been in the lodging-house business for years and years, still affects to be ashamed of it. "I can't think what father would say if he could know what we were doing," is the burden of her life-song. "It's the last thing he would ever have wished his girls to do — keep a lodging-house." The paternal Packer, it

seems, was related distantly but sufficiently to a City Sheriff, and himself was for many years a highly respected messenger in one of the older London banks. In their more daring moments his daughters have, I believe, referred to him quite easily as a banker, or at any rate have permitted the impression that he had charge of huge sums of money (as indeed he had) to go uncorrected, with the suggestion added that events were at last too much for him, and, owing to financial depression, due to vague causes, of which an iniquitous Government was the chief, he came upon heavy losses and poverty. For anyone may have a father who was a business failure; but no real lady would confess to springing from a bank messenger's loins.

Miss Emma, although less assertive than her sister (as becomes one born so long after), bleats a sympathetic chorus to the lament; and to her sister's amazement at what father would say could he only see his girls in their degrading situation, has been known to remark, "But who knows? — perhaps he does see us!" thus calling up a picture of the vigilant bank messenger at one of heaven's loopholes with but this drop of bitterness — his daughters' decline from perfect ladyhood — in an eternal cup of bliss.

They are, however, good women, the Packer sisters, and one of them cooks excellently, and if some of God's creatures have brains like dried peas and no imagination at all, the best of us are not so very wonderful.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH THE FOUR GENTLEMEN ABOVE US OBTAIN THEIR CHARACTERS AND PRIMROSE TERRACE IS RUDELY DISTURBED

ONE of the first questions which I put to Mrs. Wiles referred very naturally to the other residents of the house. The twins had severally and collectively assured us that they offered hospitality to none but gentlemen, and that four of the nicest gentlemen living were at present under their roof; but the twins have no discrimination. To them a gentleman is a gentleman — that is to say, a trousered creature who lives on bacon, makes (compared with a lady) no trouble at all, and pays his rent. Mrs. Wiles has a more observant eye, and to her, therefore, I resorted for the finer shades. The house, it appears, has three floors and a basement. The first floor is ours; above are four rooms, two of which, at the back, belong to Mr. Lacey and the two in front to Mr. Furley; above these is the top floor with four more rooms, two of which in front belong to Mr. Carstairs and two at the back to Mr. Spanton.

Of all these, Mr. Carstairs most perplexes Mrs. Wiles, and Mr. Lacey most pleases her. Mr. Car-

stairs, whom she refers to as "a nermit," I occasionally see on the doorstep — a tall, stooping man, once handsome, with a face as profoundly sad as any of Mr. Wiles's charges. "He does nothing," says Mrs. Wiles. "Retired, I suppose. And no one ever comes to see him. But he's always polite and considerate."

What the gentleman has retired from, I gather, has been this many a day and night the question which has occupied the curiosity of the basement; since what is a basement without interest in floors? That there is a mystery is certain, for has he not those two damning provocations to suspicion — a profound reticence and an inner cupboard of which he keeps the key?

From what Naomi tells me of what Mrs. Wiles tells her, the desire of the basement and its particular friend, Miss Cole (who drops in pretty regularly for a cup of tea), to find the key of this cupboard left by accident in the lock amounts to a passion. If they only knew it, they are foolish; for compared with a closed cupboard, all the open cupboards in the world are negligible. Speculation is as much superior to certainty as anticipation to fruition.

Miss Cole, who is one of London's spinster *rentiers*, with so little life of her own that other people's lives take the first place in her thoughts, and enough of an income to make her envied by her carefully chosen friends — chosen, as is too often our way, because they are humbler and capable of envy — darkly hints

at crime itself, her simple line of reasoning being that no honest person has secrets.

But Mrs. Wiles has no patience with such suggestions. "A secret he may have," she says, "but there's no harm in it, I'll be bound. But that Miss Cole always thinks the worst."

"Of course she does, poor woman," I said. "How would she get on if she didn't?" and was promptly rebuked by Naomi for my cynicism.

But Mrs. Wiles, who is an old campaigner, only laughed. "I believe you're right, sir," she said. "We're a funny lot, aren't we?"

And there, perhaps, is as true an epitaph as human nature could get.

Mr. Spanton, who has the next room to Mr. Carstairs, is a young gentleman who calls himself a Socialist. "But do you think," Mrs. Wiles asks earnestly, "that Socialists ought to have silk pyjamas? And his toilet requisites: like a lady's! But quite civil and pleasant spoken, although rather too particular about his things, and sharp with you if you dust the pictures and leave them crooked, as who that is yuman can help doing?"

The Misses Packer evidently have a very soft place in their hearts for Mr. Spanton. "Such a fastidious gentleman, and of the best family. You can tell that by the places where he gets his clothes. All his hosiery from Bond Street itself, and Miss Cole, who is often in the West End of an afternoon, tells us that she has seen the shop, and the Royal

arms are over it. How such a gentleman can talk about the country as he does, and take such an interest in the poor, is a marvel; but Miss Cole, who has a friend in the household at Buckingham Palace and hears all kinds of things, says that Socialism is quite a hobby with some of the aristocrats now. And look at Lady Warwick! Such a beautiful place as she has — Warwick Castle, where we went once with our dear father in a char-à-banc from Birmingham, when we were visiting his sister there. And Guy's Cliff, too, you know. And another day we were at Stratford-on-Avon and saw Miss Corelli's house. Such lovely window-boxes; and there, to think that Lady Warwick should be a Socialist!"

"Mr. Furley, in the first floor front, has a funny business," says Mrs. Wiles. "You'd never guess what it is. I gave Wiles three guesses and he didn't get near it — at least not nearer than conducting a matrimonial agency. He's a cinema gentleman. He makes picture plays for the theatres. Many's the ticket he's given Wiles and me to see his pieces free in the Tottenham Court Road. I love the cinema plays, especially the sad ones, but Wiles is all for the comics. It's funny we should have a cinema gentleman here now, isn't it, because before he came his rooms were occupied by a gentleman who wrote a real play — I mean a play for a real theatre. He gave us tickets too. Isn't that a coincidence — two gentlemen running who were able and willing to give tickets? I often tell people of it and

laugh. It wasn't a bad play, either," Mrs. Wiles continued, "although there was rather too much talk in it and it ended unhappily. At any rate it didn't end with wedding bells, as I hold plays should."

When, however, I pointed out to her that life rarely ended there, but in a manner of speaking only began there — her own life, for example — she was forced to confess I was right.

"I never thought of that before," she said, but quickly added, with admirable sagacity, "Still, that's life, and plays are plays; and they've nothing whatever to do with each other, have they?

"But the nicest gentleman here," she went on, "is Mr. Lacey. Always full of his jokes, and so kind. Mr. Furley is kind too, but he doesn't think. Mr. Lacey's kindness is special to yourself, if you know what I mean. And you should see his rooms — they're just like a museum, and if I dare to lift so much as a piece of crumpled-up paper he's all over me. The things he calls me, you'd be astonished; but so different from Mr. Spanton. Mr. Spanton cuts, but Mr. Lacey says them in such a way that I only laugh; and yet if a stranger that didn't know his ways were to hear, they'd think it awful. The language! In a Court of Law they'd nearly hang him for it. But there, there's few things we say or do, I often think, as wouldn't get the rope round our necks in a Court of Law if the right kind of barrister gentleman asked the questions. It makes me shiver reading the cross-examinations."

How long she would have continued, I cannot say, had she not been interrupted by the sound of voices in the street, which proceeded from a comedy storm in which the part of Boreas was played by her hero, the first-floor-back. For Mr. Lacey, although normally genial and out for fun, has in reserve for injustice a hurricane temper which he keeps in some cave of the winds within his brain. It was this that we now witnessed in action from our open window. An organist, who was English and who had but one leg, had been playing for a few minutes to a delighted audience of children. The tune was "Every nice girl loves a sailor," which is, I believe, old, but as sound in melody as the sentiment which it conveys is sound in fact. Then suddenly a policeman had arrived and waved the musician to a less select neighbourhood. Lacey, who appears to have been watching from the door step, was in the theatre of war in a moment. From our private box we could hear everything.

"Why do you send this man away?" Lacey had evidently asked.

The policeman said that he had been requested by residents not to allow street music thereabouts.

"When?" Mr. Lacey inquired.

"Oh, at different times."

"Not this morning?"

"No."

"Very well, then, give the man his chance."

"It couldn't be done," said the policeman.

"It shall be done," said Lacey. "If anyone is to be arrested let it be me," and he told the organ-grinder to continue.

At this moment a resident came out of the opposite house, and, ignoring Lacey entirely, requested the constable to move the music on.

This was meat and drink to Lacey. He turned his back on the organ and the officer and settled down to action with the householder.

Why, might he ask, was the music to be moved on?

Because the householder objected to it.

Was anyone in the house ill?

No.

And what was the householder's objections?

Such things were a nuisance and should not be permitted.

Had the householder noticed that the man had but one leg?

He had: but that was the man's affair. It had nothing to do with the case. He might, on the contrary, be a centipede for all the householder cared. The case merely was that Primrose Terrace was a quiet part, with rents accordingly, and one expected with reason to be exempt from organs.

"Very well," said Lacey. "Then understand that I too reside in Primrose Terrace and I like organs. If a sufficient number of unimaginative blockheads like yourself, who live here, decide against organs you can have a notice prohibiting them put up at the end of the street, like the other self-protective snobs all

over London. But until you do, the organs shall come here, I promise you that. And you, constable," he said, turning to the policeman, "understand that I, a resident in Primrose Terrace, wish to hear street music."

"But I can't take orders from private persons," said the policeman.

"Good," said Mr. Lacey. "That's just what I wanted you to say. I shall now make it my business to see your inspector and inform him that you take orders from private persons for harrying the poor, but refuse them for encouraging the poor. Then we shall see where we are."

And, so saying, he handed the organ-grinder a shilling and walked off to the police station.

That is Lacey. Right or wrong, that is Lacey. But, as a matter of fact, fundamentally he is always right — although his idea of rightness and Society's idea do not agree.

I need hardly say that the result of Lacey's visit to the police station was the speedy erection of a notice-board forbidding street music; for he is rarely successful in his crusades. But the crusade is the thing: not the result of it.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH A VISIT IS PAID TO A RED-HAIRED LADY AND CERTAIN MEMBERS OF LONDON'S FOREIGN POPULATION ARE ENUMERATED

ARMED with a message of introduction from Mrs. Wiles, I called on Mr. Wiles at his place of business. He is to be found under the New Ape House. You knock on the closed door opposite the King's Nepal exhibits, and as you stand there waiting for it to be opened the contemptible monkey house and the shameless prismatic mandril are on your left. By and by steps are heard on a stone passage and Mr. Wiles or his mate opens the door.

"Are you Mr. Wiles?" I asked.

He said he was, and I told him that I was Mr. Falconer, and our alliance was completed. Some friendships are made beforehand, and this was one of them.

He showed me his kitchen, where the food of these delicate exotic creatures is prepared, and then he led me to the little warm room where Barbara holds her court. She herself opened the door for us — a young clinging ourang-outang, red as Rufus, with quick sad eyes and restless hands and arms that could strangle

eyes, and restless hands, and arms that could strangle a bull. These arms she flung round Mr. Wiles's neck and he carried her to the window.

"Wouldn't do for the missis to see too much of this," he said. "Women don't understand it. She's a brick, my missis, but, bless your heart, she'd carry on a treat if she found me and Barbara like this. The rum thing," he went on, "is that Barbara's a woman too. In fact, you can't be long in these Gardens without finding out how much alike we all are — us and them. As for babies, why, they ought to *be* here; and lots of grown-up people too. Makes you think a bit, you know." He lowered his voice. "It makes you think too much, almost. What I ask myself is this, What is a soul? Because, here's Barbara, here, hasn't got one, and I have; and as far as I can see, the only difference between us, after clothes, is that she can't talk and I can. But knowing! there's nothing she doesn't know and nothing she doesn't feel. She's as understanding as a Christian and much more affectionate than many of them. What I ask myself sometimes is, Why is Barbara in a cage and all these people out and about? or, Why aren't I in a cage and Barbara paying a bob to see me? It wants a bit of thinking. It isn't enough just to say, Because I'm a man and Barbara's an ourang-outang; because, who was it called me a man and Barbara an ourang-outang? Why, man did. That is to say, it's all going his way. But what do you suppose ourang-outangs call us? Ah! Suppose"

—he lowered his voice to a whisper—"suppose ourang-outangs call themselves men and us apes! Wouldn't that be terrible? But nobody knows. Not even Dr. Chalmers Mitchell knows."

Barbara meanwhile sat absolutely motionless save that her eyes roved and her great jaws worked a little. It was enough for her that she was in Mr. Wiles's arms and he in hers.

"Look at her now," Mr. Wiles continued; "she's taking it all in. She knows what I'm saying. And another thing. The best in the land come to see her. The King and Queen are often here. Great scholars come, artists, authors. And they all make a fuss of her such as they wouldn't make of any human being outside their own families, and not them often. That's odd, isn't it? Makes you think there's something more in apes than you bargained for.

"The trouble is," he went on, "they're so delicate, ourang-outangs, and so are chimpanzees; in fact, all the larger apes. First it's bronchitis and then it's pneumonia. I've had so many pass through my hands—all dead now. Barbara's doing fairly well, but I dread the winter. I dare say you've heard of the famous performing chimpanzee—Consul? Seen him, perhaps? It might surprise you to know that there have been twenty-six Consuls since he first appeared. The public think it's the original one, but it's not. Twenty-six."

Whatever else I may have to do later in the day I manage to get to the Zoo for a little while every fine

morning. Only thus can one obtain real intimacy with any of its inhabitants, whether they have souls or not. Only thus could I have become so close a friend of the wombat, that engaging stupid Australian with his broad, blunt, good-natured face. As the wombat lives on the north bank of the turgid dyke called the Regent's Canal, into which apathetic but sanguine Londoners drop bait all day with never a bite, and nursemaids drop surreptitious love-letters when they have read them a sufficient number of times, it is upon him that I pay one of my first calls, since it is by the Albert Road gate that I enter this attractive sanctuary: passing on my way Owls' Terrace, the solemn occupants of which are either reflecting so sagely upon life (far more sagely than anybody in Primrose Terrace) or are merely pretending to, no one will ever know which.

After the wombat I visit the capuchin (or sapajou), whose peculiarity it is to be more like an old man seen through the wrong end of a telescope than any other monkey or ape will ever be, although it is the chimpanzee that has the credit of coming nighest to our perfect state. So it may, taken as a whole, but for human features, however wizened and poor, the capuchin (or sapajou) bears away the bell. According to the Zoo guide-book, the capuchin (or sapajou) differs from man principally in retaining his tail and possessing four more grinding teeth than even those of us who are lucky to keep the complement that Heaven allowed us.

I then cross the canal by the private half of the public bridge, where the visitor to the Zoo is separated from the common outsider by an iron railing which makes each look to the other far liker a wild beast than is pleasant in this neighbourhood, and so come to my gentle friends, the giraffes, those pathetic survivals from the past whom American ex-presidents and gallant big-game hunters generally are so eager to exterminate. How any thinking creature proud in the possession of an immortal soul can bring his finger to pull the trigger at such an innocent, beautiful, and liquid-eyed vegetarian as this I shall never have imagination enough to understand; but they do it continually, and evidently have no compunctions, for they are photographed afterwards with one foot on the victim's corpse.

And so past the island cave of the beaver, a creature upon whom no visitor's eye has ever rested, and who, for all the British public knows, may not be there at all, to the elephants, one of whom has been nodding his head against the bars and opening his inadequate mouth for buns ever since 1876, and will, I dare say, continue to do so for many years yet. How many buns he has eaten let the statistician compute. I have no doubt that if placed in a line touching each other they would extend from London to Adelaide in the usual manner.

After the elephant, who is all deliberate matter, I visit the otter, who is all nervous fluid and the merriest creature in the gardens, and so, by way of the magical lizards, come to Mr. Wiles and Barbara.

That is my short round. When there is more time I extend it to take in the gay little foreign birds with the pretty names, who live between the lizards and the bears, and who, with the lizards, seem to be almost more wonderful achievements on the part of the Creator than the elephant or giraffe. And I like also to look once again at the King Penguin and the Snow Leopards; but the lions and tigers I rarely visit, for I cannot bear the forlorn look in their eyes. It hurts me to think that it is partly my subscription that is keeping them here.

And coming out again into the world of men, it seems strange and unbelievable that anyone should choose to live anywhere but close to Regent's Park.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH I AM FORBIDDEN TO BE IDLE AND THEREFORE FIND CONGENIAL EMPLOYMENT

NAOMI was very firm about my finding an occupation. Men must do something, she said. As for herself, she intended to retain her various poor protégés, and to continue to visit her mother in Queen Anne's Gate every day, and probably lunch there; which made it the more important that I should have something to engage me.

"A man who has no employment is like a ship without a rudder," she said.

I replied that perhaps it was employment enough to be married to an epigrammatist. This being received without enthusiasm, I pointed out that I was executor to no fewer than three persons.

"All of whom are alive and extremely healthy," said Naomi.

"True," I answered, "but think how insecure is one's hold upon life. At any moment one of them may be crushed by a falling aeroplane and plunge me into affairs."

" 'It's ill waiting for dead men's shoes,' " Naomi quoted, and at the totally new light which the prov-

erb threw upon the attitude of the ordinary executor I broke down.

"How do you know," I asked, "that I am not writing a really valuable work on the Zoo? A philosophical treatise on apes?"

"You're not, are you?" she asked. Naomi for all her shrewdness has a childlike belief in certain things that she hears. A child could pull her leg.

"No," I said; "I am not. But I had thoughts of playing a little at writing. Wouldn't that satisfy you?"

She did not thoroughly kindle to it. "I hope you will write, dear," she said; "but that is only play anyway. And what would you write?"

"Well," I said, "supposing I was to write a book about you?"

Naomi was indignant. "About me? How could I make a book?"

"Very well then," I replied; "about us."

"But we are so uninteresting," she said. "We're so ordinary. Besides, I don't think, dear, you have — have you? — quite the novelist's gifts."

"Perhaps not," I said, "but you mustn't be a reviewer before I've begun. Anyway, mightn't I play a little at being a novelist, just for fun? I asked advice from quite a good man the other day and he said: 'When in doubt, to describe your neighbours is perhaps the second-best piece of counsel that one can give.' And that's not so very difficult. Mightn't I try that?"

"I'd love you to," she said, "only I want you to do something."

Then I made use of a cowardly argument: "When one has worked and then can afford to retire, one ought not to keep others out of a job."

Naomi, bless her, has no patience with this kind of talk. "If work is good for the soul," she said, "as I believe, one must work and let the work of others be their own affair. A pretty pass we should come to if the good men abstained from work because by so doing they were giving the loafers a better chance of taking it if they felt so inclined! But I don't want you to make any money," she added. "Something honorary and useful."

"Such as?" I asked.

"We'll find it," she said.

Chance, as so often happens, took the matter into its hands and settled it; for an evening or so later we met at a party a gentleman who had given his life to the search for, and reproduction of, old English songs and dances, several of which were rendered by a troop of London girls that he brought with him, and these melodies were so simple and fresh and charming that, although no musician, I was completely captured. In conversation with him afterwards, we learned that he was in need of assistance in forming and managing a society for the systematic encouragement and performance of these things, and at Naomi's suggestion I offered my services. So I am now an honorary secretary, one of those

bustling diplomatic persons whom reporters always describe as courteous and indefatigable.

The duties connected with the launching of this Society, together with such desultory private desk-work as it amuses me to do, ought to satisfy anyone. They convince me at any rate that no one is in such danger of overwork as that man of more or less amiable disposition who gives it out that he has retired.

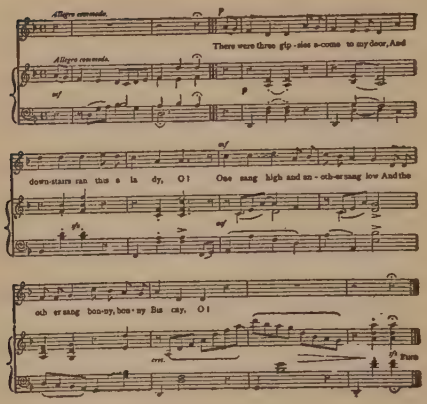
I don't pretend to understand the full value of folk-music or to be able to distinguish between the mixolydian and the dorian mode, and so forth; but I do know this, that there are no sweeter songs for young voices, or merrier and more innocent measures for young feet, and that the more we can catch of the spirit of the early days when English music had these pure and happy characteristics the better for all of us.

A very little music is ordinarily enough for me; and though I do not say that an evening at the Opera, especially when the Russians are dancing, or an afternoon at Queen's Hall now and then, is not very welcome, I would not too often be found at either. Sophisticated self-conscious music makes me too old, and the world too old, and its enigmas too difficult, and all that is best too fugitive. But these ancient English songs of an unthinking peasantry do not trouble the waters; they make for joy.

It seems to me that essential melody never reached a more exquisite purity than in "Mowing the Barley,"

and I often wonder what Society would say if, without any warning, when they were all securely in their seats at the Opera, in their best clothes, and had finished ascertaining who their immediate neighbours were, and who occupied the boxes, the curtain rose, not upon the voluptuous passion of *La Bohème*, or the civilized ache of *Louise*, or the barbaric excesses of *Scheherazade*, but upon a company of youths and children and maidens singing this lovely song. After the first shock of surprise, anxious searching of influential countenances and bewildered references to the programme, might they not settle down to the profoundest content? And as song gave way to dance, and dance to song — "Blow away the Morning Dew" to "Laudnum Bunches," and "Dargason" to "The Keys of Heaven," and "I'm Seventeen come Sunday" to "Lord Rendal" — might they not experience a feeling wholly new in that building and wholly pleasurable? For there is nothing like a plunge into the simple life now and then.

And yet — I don't know. It might be dangerous. These songs are too fascinating: Mayfair would be decimated. There is one of them so infectious in its melody, so irresistible in its appeal, that it should be rigidly excluded from the programme. The Italian's *La Bohème*, which sets so many of our stately dames in a quiver, is quite safe compared with this concise English treatment of the same theme. For "The Wraggle Taggle Gipsies" has the very seeds of revolt and escape in it. Here is the first verse:



Then she pulled off her silk finished gown
And put on hose of leather, O!
The ragged, ragged rags about our door —
She's gone with the wraggle taggle gipsies, O.

It was late last night, when my lord came home,
Inquiring for his a-lady, O!
The servants said, on every hand:
"She's gone with the wraggle taggle gipsies, O."

There's a new version of *La Bohème* for you, and no less provocative! I do not hear Caruso in it; but Caruso is not all.

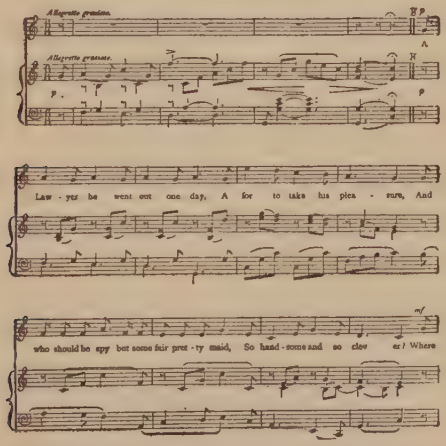
His lordship at last overtakes the rebel:

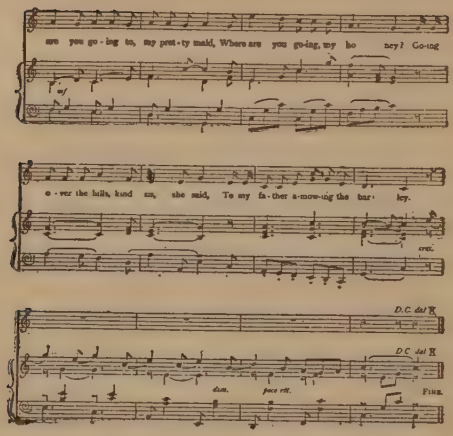
"What makes you leave your house and land?
What makes you leave your money, O?
What makes you leave your new wedded lord,
To go with the wraggle taggle gipsies, O?"

And what says she? She has heard the call of the road:

> "What care I for my house and my land?
> What care I for my money, O?
> What care I for my new wedded lord?
> I'm off with the wraggle taggle gipsies, O."

For the most part, however, these old English songs which we want to see popularized are less intoxicating. Their tunes are not those of the pied piper who would upset the family, but more serene and sweet, like the music of birds by a running stream. And the words are emotion remembered in tranquillity. This exquisite "Mowing the Barley," for example, is as artless a love-ballad as ever was written, in which the least romantic character in English life is transfigured into a hero. A lawyer, in short. I wonder that in the Temple they ever sing anything else, so proud should this ditty make them. It begins:





Rhymes, you see, don't matter much in our kind of song. We hate pedantry; and we hate everything that sets up the slightest obstacle between the singer and the listener.

The lawyer said no more that day, but the next he rode forth again, and though at first she gave him the slip (for she thought him like all lawyers, true to type) he

> Caught her round the middle so small,
> And on his horse he placed her.

The legal courting then began

> "Hold up your cheeks, my fair pretty maid,
> Hold up your cheeks, my honey,
> That I may give you a fair pretty kiss,
> And a handful of golden money."

The fair pretty maid at first refused, for she suspected the honesty of his intentions; but after he had talked a little more, and more ardently,

> She quite forgot the barley field,
> And left her father a-mowing.

And now — the end is perfect —

> And now she is the Lawyer's wife,
> And dearly the Lawyer loves her;
> They live in a happy content of life,
> And well in the station above her.

No one who has ever heard a company of fresh young voices lilting out this beautiful piece of rural idealism — for I take it that it is no small thing for a country girl to catch a lawyer, that terrible person who knows everyone's business and arranges for distraints and evictions as well as the making of wills and the lending of money — has ever known music at its very spring.

Such is "Mowing the Barley," which I always think our best song, but there is not one of the many hundreds which our indefatigable Director has collected and scored that has not a certain charm. And you can understand that I am proud to be able to help him in his organized effort to find still more, with new dances too, wherever they are still remembered, and to get enthusiasts to sing and dance them.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH WE FIND LOVERS OF TWO KINDS AND MEET WITH A POIGNANT INVENTION

"WHAT we want," the Director said, "in particular, is young men and young women to be enthusiastic about these songs and dances and get them spread about;" and lunching with Naomi at her father's, and finding there Dollie Heathcote and with him the young woman to whom, after various flirtations with others, he has become engaged, I endeavoured to kindle them. But to little purpose. Dollie, like all young men with good education and no particular bent, is just now, having given up his mild liaison with the law, thinking of selling motor-cars, and to such a character folk-song and dance has no more attraction than a nut-food luncheon to a company promoter. His line of music is that purveyed at the Gaiety and the Halls; and all he would say in commendation of our simple pleasures was that if we could do anything half as good as "In the Shadows" we might count on him to whistle it. His fiancée, a Miss Ann Ingleside, was hardly more promising as regards the songs, but was quite

willing to come to one of the dance classes and see if it was good enough fun to go on with; and that is something gained.

Why these young people should be engaged is not patent to the ordinary observer, for each seems to be an adept at independence, and they give no signs of tenderness or even affection. But among the leisured classes the devout lover has gone out. They were talking at lunch about the afternoon's plans. Dollie was for a matinee; Ann for a hockey final at Richmond. They were selfish enough to refuse each to give way to the other, but not sufficiently detached to wish to be alone. Such conflicts naturally end in victory for the stronger, since there is no spontaneous giving way, and of course that was Ann. So Heathcote had to forego his matinee. Personally I think I would like to see some colourable imitation of turtle-doving come in again. It was very silly, no doubt, for young couples to be so publicly fond, and yet it was rather pretty too; whereas the new ostentation of cool self-sufficiency can be almost ugly.

Yet there are still the profounder tendernesses. Let me tell you a story:

The man had become very ill — could hardly move from where he lay; and she, who loved him, and was to have married him, and spent all her waking hours in thinking what she could do for him, persuaded him to have a telephone installed and brought to his bedside so that he and she could talk, and he could talk with others, too. Every night he rang her up

and they had a long conversation; many times in the day also. Nothing, as it happened, could have saved his life, but this modern device lightened his last weeks.

His death, although it blasted her hopes, made no difference to her devotion. She merely installed his memory in the place of his rich personality and loved that. He, almost more than ever, was her standard. What he would have liked, she did; what he would have disliked, she left undone. Although dead, he swayed her utterly; and under his dominion she was equable and gentle, although broken at heart. She took all things as they came, since how could anything matter now that everything that mattered was over?

One perplexity only had power to trouble her, and that was the wonder, the amazement, the horror, not only that so much knowledge and kindliness and sympathy and all that made for the world's good and happiness should be so wantonly extinguished; but that no touch of the vanished hand should be permitted to the one soul (now left behind) with whom his soul had been fused. This she could neither understand nor forgive. Religious she had never been in the ordinary sense, although such religion as must sway a true idealistic lover was hers; but now she broke even from such slender ties as had held her to orthodoxy. She threw off the creed of her parents as naturally and simply as if it were a borrowed garment, and sank into her sorrow, which was also her solace, without another thought of here or hereafter.

So it went on for a year or so, during which time

his house had remained empty, save for a caretaker — for she (who was rich) could not bear that anyone else should live there — and his room exactly as he had died in it.

One evening she dined out. Her next neighbour on one side was a young American engineer, and in their conversation they came in time to the topic of invention and the curious aptitude for inventiveness shown by the American race. It was a case, said the engineer, of supply following demand: all Americans required time-and-labour-saving appliances, and they obtained them. Where servants abounded and there was no servant problem, as in England and on the Continent, the need for such contrivances was not acute. And so on. The conversation thus begun reached at last specific inventions, and the engineer told of a remarkable one which had come under his notice just before he left New York.

"You will probably not believe me," he said; "the thing sounds incredible; but then who would have believed once that there could be a telegraph, and still less a telephone? Who would have believed that the camera would ever be anything but a dream? I will tell you what this is. It is a machine in which you insert a portion, no matter how small, of a telephone wire, and by turning a handle you compel this piece of wire to give back every message that has ever passed over it."

She held her heart. "This really exists?" she forced herself to ask.

"Actually," said the engineer. "But when I left home the inventor was in a difficulty. All the messages were coming out all right, but backwards. Naturally the reproduction would be from the most recent to the less recent. By writing down the words and then reversing them the investigator could of course get at what he was wanting — I may say that the invention is for the New York police — but my friend is convinced that he can devise some mechanical system of reversing at the time which will make the messages read forward as they should. Just think of the excitement of the detective, listening through all the voices and ordinary conversations on the wire for the one voice and the one sentence that will give him his long-desired clue! — But are you ill?"

"No, no," she said, although her face was a ghastly white, "no; it is nothing. The room is a little hot. Tell me some more about your inventive friend. Is he wealthy?"

"Indeed, no," said the engineer. "That is his trouble. If he had more money, or if he had some rich backers who believed in him, he might do wonders."

"I should like to help him," she said. "This kind of work interests me. Could you not cable him to come over and bring the thing with him? I would gladly finance him. I want some sporting outlet like that for my money."

"Cable?"

"Yes, cable. There are things that one does by

impulse or not at all. The butler here will get you a form."

It was a few weeks later that she went to the empty house with an employee of the telephone company, and they extracted a foot of the precious wire. That night she held it in her trembling fingers and placed it in the machine. Then she carefully locked the door and drew the heavy curtain over it and carried the machine to the farthest corner of the room. There, with a sigh of relief and tense and almost terrible anticipation, she sat down and placed her ear to the receiver and began to turn the handle.

His voice sounded at once: "Are you there?" It was quite clear, so clear and unmistakable and actual that her hand paused on the handle and she bowed her throbbing head. She turned on. "Are you there?" the familiar tones repeated. And then the reply, "Yes, who is it?" in a woman's voice. Then he spoke again. "Ernest," he said. "Is it Helen?" Again her hand paused. Helen — that rubbishy little woman he had known all his life and was on such good terms with. She remembered now that she had been away when the telephone was installed and others had talked on it before her. It could not be helped: she had meant to be the first, but circumstances prevented. There must be many conversations before she came to her own; she would have to listen to them all. She turned on, and the laughing, chaffing conversation with this foolish little Helen person repeated itself out of the past now so tragic.

To other talks with other friends, and now and then with a tradesman, she had to listen; but at last came her own.

"Is that you?" she heard her own voice saying, knowing it was her own rather by instinct than by hearing. "Is that you? But I know it is. How distinctly you speak!"

"Yes, it's me" — and his soft vibrant laugh.

"How are you, dear?"

"Better, I hope."

"Have you missed me?"

"Missed you!"

And then the endearments, the confidences, the hopes and fears, the plans for the morrow, the plans for all life. As she listened the tears ran down her face, but still she turned on and on. Sometimes he was so hopeful and bright, and again so despairing.

She remembered the occasion of every word. Once she had dined out and had gone to the theatre. It was an engagement she could not well refuse. It was an amusing play and she was in good spirits. She rang him up between the acts and found him depressed. Hurrying home, she had settled down to talk to him at her ease. How it all came back to her now.

"Are you there, my dearest?"

"Yes, but oh, so tired, so old!"

"It is a bad day. Everyone has been complaining of tiredness to-day."

"You say that because you are kind. Just to

comfort me. It's no use. I can see so clearly sometimes, I shall never get well — to-night I know it."

"My darling, no."

And then silence — complete, terrifying.

She had rung up without effect. He had fainted, she thought, and had dropped the receiver. She was in a fever of agony. She leaped into a cab and drove to his house. The nurse reassured her; he had begun to sob and did not want her to know it, and now he was asleep.

But there was no sleep for her that night. What if he were right — if he really knew? In her heart she feared that he did; with the rest of her she fought that fear.

As she listened, the tears ran down her face, but still she turned on and on. She sat there for hours before the last words came, the last he was ever to speak over the wire.

It was to make an appointment. He had rallied wonderfully at the end and was confident of recovery. She was to bring her *modiste* to his room at eleven o'clock the next morning with her patterns, that he might help in choosing her new dress. He had insisted on it — the dress she was to wear on his first outing.

"At eleven," he had said. "Mind you don't forget. But then you never forget anything. Good night once more, my sweet."

"Good night."

She had never seen him again alive. He died before the morning.

She put the machine away and looked out of the window. The sun had risen. The sky was on fire with the promise of a beautiful day. Worn out, she fell asleep; to wake — to what? To such awakening as there is for those who never forget anything.

. . . . . .

Every night found her bending over the machine. She had learned now when not to listen. She had timed the reproduction absolutely, and, watch in hand, she waited until the other messages were done, and her own voice began. There was no condensing possible; one must either each time have every conversation or stop it. But how could she stop it before the end?

Locking the door and drawing the heavy curtain, she would sit down in the far corner and begin to turn. She knew just how fast to turn for others; so slowly for herself. When the watch gave her the signal she would begin to listen.

"Is that you? Is that you? But I know it is. How distinctly you speak!"

"Yes, it's me" — and the soft vibrant laugh.

"How are you, dear?"

"Better, I hope."

"Have you missed me?"

"Missed you!"

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH WE MEET THE FIRST-FLOOR-BACK AND FIND THAT THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS STILL RUNS

SO far I agree with Mrs. Wiles in thinking Mr. Lacey the pick of the house; but my opinion is of less weight than it might be since I have not yet met the others, except in the most casual way, at the front door, when we say how fine it is or how exceedingly probable is rain, and so part. But no London house of apartments could possibly shelter two men as attractive as Mr. Lacey.

We came into knowledge of each other by the merest chance. I was returning very late at night, and found, seated on the top step fondling a cat, the first-floor-back. I knew him by sight, of course, owing to the organ-grinder *scena*, but we had not spoken.

"I'm glad you've come," he said; "I've been here for nearly an hour, and the bell's broken and I've left my latch-key somewhere. I was banking on the chance of one of the others coming in late."

I let him in and he bade farewell to his companion. "Poor thing," he said, "she's so miserable. She's just going to have kittens. It's a hard world for women."

Since then we have walked into London together now and then, and I have taken him to the Zoo on Sundays. He is at his best there. He seems to love and understand all animals, and he knows a good deal about them. In fact, it was he who introduced me to the giant toad who eats worms behind the scenes at the Reptile House. No one who has not seen this miracle of dining would believe either in the length or quickness of the toad's tongue.

Lacey is a little spare man, very active and restless, with a clean-cut aquiline nose, sensitive mouth, alert grey eyes, and a brow which extends to the back of his head. His hands are delicate and strong and always perfectly kept, although his clothes can be rather shabby. His nose and his name, Nathan, combined, have led people to suppose him a Jew; but he has no Jewish blood.

"Why my father gave me such a name beats me," he says, "and why I never had enough pluck to change it beats me even more. But he was a good old soul and he chose it deliberately; and I have gone back on him sufficiently as it is. But what chance has a Christian called Nathan? He is doubly handicapped, for everyone thinks him a Jew and acts accordingly, and not being a Jew he cannot profit or retaliate. If I had been a Jew I should be a millionaire to-day. The chances I've had! But it is my destiny to be unable to carry through any speculation. I acquire at top prices and sell at bottom: that's me. Or else I get bored with bargain-

ing and give the infernal thing away. I have the wish, but not the instinct — that's the trouble. I make the most pathetic efforts to be cunning, but it's all no good."

Without such talk his face tells me that the world has dealt him some hard blows; but he has never given in. He has the finest of all breastplates — enthusiasm; and to this he adds that other trusty buckler against the arrows of fate, a short memory. I mean a short memory for his own troubles: it is long enough if he promises to do anything for you. The rapidity of his mental recovery is amazing. If he were sentenced to death and on his way to the Tyburn gallows from Newgate, he would see, long before the cart reached Chancery Lane, something in the streets so interesting that all recollection of the rope would be effaced.

Lacey is more intelligent and sympathetic than most persons, but the trait which distinguishes him chiefly from the mass of his fellows is his impulsive, generous helpfulness and his desire that you should share in any good secret. He simply cannot leave any house or any acquaintance quite as he finds them. He had not been in our sitting-room for five minutes the first time I invited him in, before he had noticed that we wanted new candle-shades. "You've got the wrong kind of holder too," he said. "You should get those heavy ones that slip down automatically as the candle burns. Give me a piece of paper and I'll let you have the address. And here's the address

of a little woman who makes the most exquisite shades."

It is characteristic of Lacey that he knows so many little women who want a helping hand. Always little women or devilish unlucky women. In fact, he is the best friend the unlucky ever had: they gravitate to him as by a natural law.

He is the frankest man I ever met and certainly one of the most engaging. He has no reticences at all. His character is public property. And this without any swagger of disclosure, but naturally and simply. He says all that he feels and thinks at the same moment that he feels and thinks it: in fact, speech is a part of the feeling and the thought. Without this articulation both would be incomplete. But although so frank currently, he does not refer much to his past. His present occupation is secretary to one of the London Art clubs, and during their exhibitions he sits at a table and arranges for the sale of the few pictures which attract the few persons who can find money for such luxuries after having paid their chauffeur's bills. He always has a scheme for adding to his income. One day he has bought for a few shillings a grimy oil-painting which when cleaned and restored will fetch thousands. This morning he was all on fire to open a restaurant in a novel place, somewhere off Fleet Street or in the city itself. The novelty consists in limiting the food provided strictly to chops, hot, with hot buttered toast, and chops, cold, with salad. Nothing else at all,

except drink. I don't see why the place should fail; but I feel sure that if it is started and made profitable Lacey will not be the chief receiver of the profits.

"You see," he says, "my difficulty. I can't run a restaurant. I should hate it too much. What I want — what men like me want — is a decent financier to pay us for our ideas and for assisting in making them practicable, and then to let us go. But the worst of it is, that few things succeed unless the man who invented them goes through with it. But how could I? There's not only the horror of spending beautiful days among chops hot and chops cold, but I should pay everyone too much."

"How did you come to think of it?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "I thought of it yesterday. I let my chop get cold owing to all kinds of distractions, and then found it delicious. 'This is the food for busy men,' I said, and in the late afternoon I walked down Fleet Street and looked for a suitable site. That's where I stopped. A really capable man would have found the site and arranged for the restaurant. But my fate," he said, "is to make money for other people; never for myself. I have never touched a scheme that did not fail, and I have never given anyone else a piece of financial advice that was not successful. All the horses I ever backed have fallen dead at the starting gate. That's my luck. But otherwise — except for money — I don't think I'm so unlucky. For one thing I can always sleep, and I'm never ill."

Lacey always has little odds and ends of information such as no one else can supply. The other day, for example, he had heard what muffin and crumpet men do in the summer. I don't say all of them, but one at any rate. He sews chenille spots on ladies' veils.

Lacey also collects strange names and words, and just now is in transports of delight over a country cobbler's bill which included a charge of fourpence for "unsqueakening" a pair of boots.

Naomi likes him no less than I do; and since husbands and wives, I have noticed, do not always agree about friends, this is most satisfactory. He likes her, too, and brings her little offerings which I feel sure he can ill afford. "You shouldn't buy all these things," Naomi says; to which he replies, "Buy! I never buy anything. Now and then I pick up something; but I never pay anything for it."

Last night, for example, he brought her a sampler for her collection — a peculiarly amusing one, made by Katherine Vallance, who finished it on the 5th of August 1783.

"It never ought to be given to you," said Mr. Lacey, "since it was obviously made for a plain woman; but I'm sure you'll like it."

The verse runs thus:

What is the blooming tincture of the skin
To peace of mind and harmony within?
What the bright sparkling of the finest eye
To the soft soothing of a calm reply?

Can comeliness of form, of shape, of air,
With comeliness of words or deeds compare?
No, those at first th' unwary heart may gain,
But these, these only, can the heart retain!

One wonders how the little Katherine came to set about embroidering those sentiments. But perhaps it was not a little Katherine at all, but a maturer one who had been jilted for a prettier face, and this was at once her consolation and revenge.

Naomi's samplers offer a complete scheme of placid rectitude. Whether it was really easier to be good a hundred and more years ago than now one cannot know; but the testimony of the woolwork of the time makes virtue almost automatic. Thus, one of Naomi's samplers (the work of Lydia Vickers, aged ten) begins with this inquiry:

How shall the young preserve their ways from all pollution free?

That was the question. The answer comes promptly:

By making still their course of life with Thy commands agree.

Nothing could be simpler; except perhaps the instructions of the dying Sir Walter Scott to his son-in-law and biographer: "My dear, be a good man; be virtuous; be religious. Nothing else will give you any comfort when you come to lie here." Those surely were less complex times. To-day — well, my Utopia, if ever I framed one, would be a land where the laws demanded that people should be vicious.

Then one would be able to count at any rate on a little virtue. If no man might live with a woman in any but an irregular union, there would be at once quite a run on honest matrimony and the Law Courts would be full of desperately wicked monogamists; while if everyone was expected to steal and swindle, there would soon be an extensive criminal class who respected property.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH MR. DABNEY WARMS HIS HOUSE WITH A DISCUSSION AND I AM GLAD TO GET HOME

MR. DABNEY of *The Balance* having asked me to his housewarming, I found myself in his new rooms at about half-past nine, prepared for an unwonted night of it. He pretends that after my departure for the altar a period of decadence set in over Bemerton's and he had at last to leave. All inhabitants of rooms know these fluctuations. Everything will go smoothly for years and then suddenly comes a relaxation of energy on the part of the staff. It will come *chez* Packer without a doubt; but not just yet.

Dabney has moved from Westminster to the Temple, where a gentleman ought to live — to a noble suite in King's Bench Walk with a sidelong view of the river across the grass, on which in the cool of the evening the agile barristers disport themselves at lawn-tennis. He looks towards Lambeth and has a blessed glimpse over the trees and roofs of the giant gasometer of the Oval, and he can imagine on a summer's day all kinds of delectable occurrences in

progress on the other side of it — Hitch at mid-off stopping express trains; Hobbs at the wicket, punishing and masterful; or whatever he most fancies.

The white wainscotted room when I entered it was full of smoke and noisy with talk. I contrived to find Dabney's hand in the fog and he pushed me into a chair. I gathered that public men were under discussion: the session was well advanced and the unexpected abilities which it had brought forth and the old abilities which it had tested and found wanting were being appraised, in the off-hand smoking-room way. Funny to one outside the machine to hear names which ought by their eminence to inspire respect — and among the simple and ignorant do so — tossed about so lightly and discussed so contemptuously. This man, it is true, was fifty per cent. stronger than last year; but most of them were disappointments, done.

These terrible fellows sized up everyone and everything, as they puffed and sipped. And there was nothing they did not know. They knew all the secrets of the Court as well as of Parliament. They knew why this man's name was not in the last list of honours and why that man's was. They knew everyone who drank too much and everyone who loved unwisely but too well.

Politics, I confess, do not interest me, except as warp and woof of the newspaper drama of life. I would not like to be a politician; nor indeed could I. Only a surgical operation would be able to effect

that: some phlebotomizing process, to be followed by an injection of molten brass into the deplenished veins. But I like to watch the wire-pullers at work. There was one at Dabney's, the secretary to some organization: a bulky Rabelaisian cigar-smoker, or I might almost say cigar-eater, named Rudson-Wayte. Looking at him through the haze, as he absorbed his tobacco and drank his whisky, I found myself wondering if on that idle Sunday — the first week-end — the Creator, when He surveyed His six days' work, had exact foreknowledge of these two lenitives and the extent to which His children in the distant days to come would depend upon them. Rudson-Wayte more even than most men at an editor's housewarming leant upon both, and they seemed to agree with him, for his head was undoubtedly clear and hard. In a bout with the gloves or a hundred yards' sprint no doubt he would cut a poor enough figure on such a regimen; but then the highly specialized civilization under which he flourishes has eliminated both necessities. Perfectly easy nowadays for a London gentleman to live fifty years after leaving College and never accelerate his steps at all.

Not that Rudson-Wayte was a stranger to the strenuous life; but always from without. He had looked down amusedly from many a platform and watched ejections and free fights; but he had not taken part. His, to observe and make the best of the situation for his party. He told us of many

such experiences and of the strategy which he had devised for the safety of his speakers. He referred to them as his men. "Of course, the only thing for me to think of was how to get my man out of it." And so forth.

"My man was a bit of a stick, not long married, and his precious skin was rather on his mind. The crowd was ugly too; began breaking the chair legs off for clubs. He hadn't any way with him at all, but there were reasons why he should have gone down there to speak, and he was sound enough on the principal question. Brought down his fist at the right moments, you know, and had quite a clever way with the word 'Mister' — for or against. But the game was up now, and things got worse when we heard that there was a gang outside waiting for us. There was only one thing to do and I did it. I got hold of four others of my lot and told them their *rôles*. Then I turned up my collar, and smashed my hat in so as not to be recognized, grabbed my man, and we carried him forcibly out by the back door. As I feared, there were a thousand of them there waiting to duck the whole platform. The instant we emerged from the door supporting our burden, who was all collapsed into his clothes, I called out, 'A doctor! A doctor! Is there a doctor here?' They shut down at once and made a path for us. Bless you, the British public can't be trusted to carry anything through. They're always waiting to be diverted. It touched their old hearts, don't

you see? 'Somebody hurt? Steady on, boys. Let them through first,' and so on. So we got through and were driving to the next town and the train for London in no time. London's the mother."

He seemed to me rather a hateful type, this cynical manipulator of candidates and passions; but Dabney tells me that he is really one of the best of men, with naturally very simple tastes, domesticated, musical, and devoted to ornithology. It is one of the bores of growing old, that one loses the power of dividing the sheep and the goats. When one is young, bad men are bad men and good men good men. As one gets older their boundaries begin to get confused and encroach each on the other; and I suppose that by the time I am seventy I shall not know any difference between them.

I asked Rudson-Wayte about bribery and corruption — were they extinct?

"As the dodo, I don't think," he replied. "The more you have to do with politics, the more you realize that human nature is human nature. Nothing ever changes. People tell you that Dickens was a caricaturist, an exaggerator. He may have been when he wrote about some things, but not when he described the Eatanswill election. That's as true as a Blue Book — every word of it — and always will be. Human nature doesn't get out of date. Bribery and corruption! — great Heavens, what else should there be? I don't say that money passes from hand to hand quite so crudely; but money's not the only

medium of bribery. Every man has his price to-day, as ever, only he often prefers payment in kind. Why, you can bribe a man with virtue now and then. The big Nonconformist employers who carry a hatful of votes — lay preachers, you know — you can get at them by sitting under them one Sunday. They don't want money or promises: they want homage. Of course they do. Another man merely wants to be seen accepting a cigar from your own case; another to take your arm in public. It's after the election's over that this last type becomes such a nuisance."

"It's a low game," Dabney said, "and you're a low lot, and I don't really know why I like you and ask you to sit under a decent roof."

Rudson-Wayte smiled joyously. "No worse than editing a paper," he said, "and suppressing the truth about everything."

"And who does that?" Dabney asked quiveringly.

"You do, of course, every week. You attack one side for its turpitude and cynicism and applaud the other side for its high ideals and self-sacrifice, when you know there's not a penny to choose between them. They're just the same men, with different views as to how a business should be managed. You know that: you must know, because directly one of the big men on the other side — one of your blackest bugbears — retires, or dies, or loses his wife, you have an article on his personal charm and private integrity, the whole thing really proving him an arrant

humbug ready to support against his conscience any policy forced upon him by his party or venal circumstance. You can't deny it. And again, every now and then when some non-party question brings two conspicuous opponents on the same platform in agreement, with compliments to each other, you say how delightful are these amenities of English political life which permit private friendliness to exist alongside public hostility; whereas that is, when looked into a little deeper, really a cause for shame, because men should be all of a piece. Well, what I say is that if you can write calmly like that of party politicians, and defend it, there is no need for me to be troubled by your condemnation of me for being concerned in the making of party politics."

Dabney really took it very well, and as a matter of fact I don't know that he could have made much of a defence even if he had not been our host. All he said was, "Well, damn the party system anyway."

A young man who had been interjecting remarks very freely here took the floor.

"Of course," he said, "damn the party system. The whole mischief is the party system. It's rotten to the core. What we want in Parliament is the best men, not the machine-made men. But that's all that the voter can be allowed to vote for. How many independent, thinking men are there in Parliament to-day? Not half a dozen, and the few that there are steadily being frozen out. The machine can't endure them, and the machine is on top. I

got a ticket for the House the other day and saw the conspiracy in action. There was an old man in our village who used to say that 'very few persons are better than anyone else,' and I thought of these words as I sat there and watched all those blighters at work. It was a terrible eye-opener. I knew that they were obsolete and stupid and pledged to the swindle, but I had no notion how stupid they were. No candour anywhere. On the one side bland red-tapism, and on the other the insincere acrimony of the Jack-out-of-office. Their manners, too, are an outrage — they chatter while speeches are going on; they shout offensive criticisms; there is never a moment when some one is not walking about. It's got to be changed."

"All very well," said Rudson-Wayte; "but you'll never be without it. Men fall into parties as naturally as they fall into temptation. There must be *pros* and *cons*. If you want to know how deeply rooted the party system is you have only to read the papers that advocate its removal. Their objection to party is to the party that is in. I have observed that when a paper boasts of having no favour for one party or the other it makes up for it by having an increased hostility towards one party or the other. No; if you really wanted to lead a crusade you would call for a party pledged not to add another law to the Statute Book as long as it held office. That would be something like. Also it would automatically rid the party at any rate of the legal element.

But this is shop. For Heaven's sake talk about something else."

"We will," said Dabney, "but it will be shop all the same."

Dabney was right. Everything came round to shop very quickly, and, tiring of the monotony, I slipped away.

Dabney apologized for the dullness of the evening. "You see, this time," he said, "I had to ask everyone. We have better talk at our smaller gatherings. Come when I entertain some novelists."

I said that perhaps I would, and walked homewards correcting my estimates of our public men by the light of the evening's revelations. But by the time I reached the Euston Road I had decided to let them all stand as they were a little longer. Those fellows were only talking, I said. Strike London dumb for a year and how we should get on! Progress then!

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH AN HONEST COUPLE WHO NEVER DID ANYONE ANY HARM ARE SEEN ON THE BRINK OF THE STRUGGLE WITH PROSPERITY

IT was the next morning, I think, that Mrs. Wiles entered the room in a state of high tension and handed me a letter. It came, she said, after Wiles had left for the Zoo, and would I do her the great favour of conveying it to him? But, first of all, would I read it and give my opinion as to whether or not it was a "have"? With these words she asked permission to sit down, and sank into a chair with her hand on her heart in something very like collapse. While Naomi fetched a restorative I opened the letter and read as follows:

"MR. MORDECAI WILES.

"DEAR SIR, — It is our pleasure to inform you that in accordance with the terms of the will of the late Samuel Wiles of 18 Bonchurch Road, Melbourne, of which we enclose a copy, you are sole heir to his property. To what this amounts we cannot at present state, but not less than £50,000. We beg to enclose

a cheque for £500 to meet any emergencies that may occur, and await your instructions as to our future action. — We are, yours obediently,

"MORGAN & RICE"

Who was this Mr. Wiles, I asked. Mrs. Wiles said that he was an uncle of her husband's, as indeed I instinctively knew, for is not Australia peopled by uncles who do this kind of thing?

"Do you know how much it is?" I asked her. "It's two thousand a year, without touching the capital at all. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," she said. "Ask Wiles. It frightens me. We were so happy, too."

"But you needn't be any less happy," said Naomi.

"I don't know. It frightens me," the poor thing repeated. "It's too late. Wiles will get so fat."

"Oh no," said Naomi, "we must see to that. We must keep him busy."

"It isn't as if we had children," said Mrs. Wiles. "Then it might be a good thing. But we're all alone. We've never spent so much as two pounds a week in our lives. And the little nest-egg we'd been saving all these years — to buy a house with — it makes that look so foolish!" The good creature was actually in tears. "But perhaps it's all a mistake," she added more brightly.

"I don't think so," I said. "This cheque is too real for that, and the copy of the will, too. Your husband's name is Mordecai, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid so," she said.

I carried the momentous documents to the New Ape-House, not without trepidation and misgiving. They were, I could see, the death-warrant to Wiles as Barbara's keeper; and I felt resentment against fate for so brutally breaking this bond, apart altogether from other mischief which might ensue. It was not as if either Wiles or his wife had imagination or any breadth of view. They were the most ordinary, simple, faithful creatures, not in the least discontented with their lot, and not in the least fitted to receive a fortune. They were too good for it; they had done nothing to deserve such a chastisement. A hundred a year — that would have been sensible: a fund against illness, a security for old age, a sanction for certain little extras now; but two thousand a year was monstrous.

Wiles was just showing out some impatient F.Z.S. when I arrived, and I watched the transfer of a shilling from hand to hand. Looking the F.Z.S. over, I doubted if he had more than £1800 a year, and smiled to myself. Wiles led me in, and for a time I did nothing but caress Barbara and feed her with grapes.

Then I said, "Mr. Wiles, how would you like to be rich?"

"Rich," he said. "How rich?"

"Well, rich enough to spend as many days as you liked at Lord's or the Oval?"

"But what about my apes?" he asked.

"I mean so rich that you couldn't very well go on looking after them," I said.

"I shouldn't like that," he replied.

"But don't you ever want a holiday?"

"Not more than a day or so. I can't trust my mate enough for more than that."

"But surely if you had to leave the Zoo owing to a fortune you could get accustomed to it?"

Wiles became suspicious. "May I ask who and what you're getting at?" he said.

I handed him the letter. He read it and the will several times.

"Well, I'm jiggered," he said at last. "Well, I'm jiggered."

"Your wife asked me to bring it," I told him.

"So I supposed," he said. "And she, what does she think of it all?"

"She's jiggered too," I said.

"Poor old girl," he said. "How much a year do you reckon it comes to?" he asked.

"About two thousand pounds."

He whistled. "And here have I been looking in a pawnbroker's window in Camden Town High Street for the past three months, wondering if I could treat myself to a meerschaum pipe he's got there, at twelve-and-six, to smoke on Sundays. I can have a bushel of them now, and there's no fun in it."

I walked back by way of the sea-lions' enclosure to refresh my eyes with the King Penguin's perfect ecclesiastical tailoring. He was pacing moodily

about as usual, in what one felt to be the interval between a marriage ceremony and a funeral service. Much better, I thought, to have left the £2000 a year to him. No harm would then be done, and what perfect episcopal garden-parties he could give with it!

The Misses Packers' attitude to Mrs. Wiles, Naomi tells me, underwent an extraordinary change on hearing the news. That they were losing an excellent and inexpensive assistant they could not forget; and they overwhelmed her with attentions, led her downstairs with the tenderest solicitude, and plied her with tea. This was not, I am convinced, the rather ugly homage of the poor to the rich, but merely paying success its due. For the Misses Packer belong to that large branch of the human family which worships success. Mrs. Wiles had succeeded: she was worth £2000 a year; and they recognized her merit accordingly. They did not want any of her money or envy her her position at the top of the tree: they merely lit a votive lamp before her.

The next day Mrs. Wiles was able to tell us more. Wiles had been thinking it over and had decided to do nothing until the estate was wound up and all the money his. He had, however, mentioned the matter to two or three of his mates in confidence; but this turned out to be one of the secrets that apparently no one ever pretends to try to keep, for by night everyone knew of it: Wiles was a millionaire; and fourteen men that he didn't like first asked him to drink and then tried to borrow five shillings.

"I shall go on here too," said Mrs. Wiles. "That is, as long as they'll let me. But they do treat me so ladylike it makes me nervous, and that Miss Cole wants to find a house for me and introduce me to some of her friends. The idea! Still, it would be a nice thing to give up the place and then find the whole affair was a noax. Oh, and please, Wiles says, would you be so kind as to take care of this cheque for him — put it in your bank?"

As it happened, it was no hoax, and, circumstances quickly proving too much for them, the Wiles had to become gentlefolk. The result is that Wiles has left the Zoo and wears black clothes. These are not out of respect for the avuncular gander who laid the golden eggs, but because black clothes signify a holiday, and all life is now a holiday for him. Mrs. Wiles has left us and wears a hat ten years too young for her, with cherries. They have moved to a new house in a quiet street off the Camden Town Road, where they keep a small servant; but this is a waste of money, for, in the first place, Mrs. Wiles does everything in the end, and, in the second place, their old neighbours would gladly club together to pay the girl's wages themselves, just to be kept informed at first hand of how the millionaires are going on.

Naomi and I called, by invitation, to take tea with them, and we were all polite and uncomfortable, and I saw poor Wiles's eyes and thoughts wandering towards the kitchen, where he could have taken off his coat and been at his ease. I found that he had

spent the morning, as I expected, at the Zoo, talking to old friends, and in fact he usually drops in for an hour every day.

"Yes," said his wife, rather acidly, "can't keep away from his Barbara."

Mrs. Wiles admitted that she had been cleaning up a little; unoccupied rooms do get that dirty in London. In the afternoon Wiles reads the paper or takes a walk, and sometimes Mrs. Wiles accompanies him to a picture palace. In the evening he becomes more normal again and drops into a public-house and perhaps plays a game of billiards; but even in these blessed hours, when bed is approaching and another day dies, things are not the same, for he can no longer frequent his old haunt, the Cross Keys. He went there for a little while, but had to give it up, partly on account of chaff, but chiefly because he found that he was expected to pay for everything for everybody. So now he spends his evenings in finding new houses of call, where his history is unknown, in continual fear of an old acquaintance coming in and giving him away.

"Then wealth isn't an unmixed blessing?" I asked.

"I wouldn't say that, sir, not yet; but it's a terrible change. What worries me more than anything else — even more than finding how many friends I've got that I'd never dreamed were friends at all — is the way that when you have money you're afraid of spending it. When I had my wages and a little

over in tips I knew where I was. Now I don't know anything. As I've told the missis time and again, it's going to make a miser of me."

"If you'll take my advice," I said to Wiles, "you will buy a share in some small business that will give you an interest and an occupation. You are too young to be doing nothing: you'll go to seed and get ill. Don't let money injure you: make it a useful servant and friend."

"Yes; but what can I do?" he asked.

"Well, we must make inquiries," I said. "There must be such things going."

"And if you'll take my advice," said Naomi to Mrs. Wiles, "you'll adopt a child; not so small as to be an anxiety, but just big enough to be a companion and a nice responsibility."

Personally I wish this Australian uncle had been a decent bankrupt, for his money has done no one any good. The Zoo has lost a capable keeper; the Misses Packer and ourselves have lost a good servant; and the Wiles have lost peace of mind and any real reason for existence.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH THE TOP-FLOOR-BACK TURNS OUT TO BE AN ACQUAINTANCE AND SCHEMES ARE UNFOLDED FOR THE SALVATION OF OF AN EFFETE RACE

WE had at school a literature master who, in the course of many hundreds of discourses, made two remarks which have never left me; or would it not be fairer to say that of the hundreds of lectures which I heard from a certain literature master I have succeeded in retaining two injunctions? One was the comment (which he had from Dr. Johnson) that repetition is a fault rarely committed by bad writers, and the other, that what we call coincidences should never be noticed. This being so, I cannot describe as a coincidence the fact that the young Socialist at Dabney's turns out to be our own Socialist of the top floor of whose profounder sincerities Mrs. Wiles is so sceptical. I saw him the next day both enter the house and leave it, banging the door with a vehemence that would break up any delicately organized communistic home; and since then we have met in mutual recognition and have conversed.

Spanton seems to be very much in earnest — a boyish figure of about twenty-six, clean shaven, but without the soft brown clothes, costly Jaegerisms, and other external insignia of his kind. On the contrary, he is a bit of a dandy, uses quite superlative soap, and has a manicure set. It has been said that nothing is more annoying than to be agreed with when one is indulging a mood of self-depreciation. Well, Spanton will never be annoyed that way.

"They're a foolish lot," he said, referring to the company at Dabney's. "They go there every week just to cackle, and none of them ever lives at all. Except possibly that blackguard, Rudson-Wayte, and he ought to be in gaol. But the whole world's like that. All my friends and acquaintances are either writing or talking or vegetating. Dabney kindles to excitability every day over something said in the House, or something said by other journalists about something said in the House, and that's how he will go on spending this boon of life to the end — never travelling, never suffering, never being hungry or thirsty or wicked. What a way to live! And your novelists and dramatists too" — like so many of the world's reformers this young man has the most exasperating way of saying "you" and "your" — "your novelists and dramatists trafficking in the sham emotions of their puppets, how they are wasting this boon of life! And all their myriad audiences in the theatres, or readers reclining on sofas, how they are wasting it! — lulling themselves with the stories of

fictitious mannikins, instead of doing something, almost no matter what. And this enemy of society who lives under our very roof, the cinema man, what an account there will be to settle with him one day! He's one of the worst lullers.

"It infuriates me. Something has got to be done, and I'm going to do it. England's got to look herself in the face. She's been dodging the mirror for years, but she's got to do it. I'm out to see that she does."

Asked what he did towards that end, Spanton said that at the moment he was delivering a series of lectures at such boys' schools as permitted treason to be talked. They were addresses on Socialism; not pure Socialism, but a brand of his own.

"Because, of course," he said, "we must get hold of the younger generation. The middle-aged and the elderly are no good; young men, youths, and boys are the best material. I show them as vividly as I can how dependent all of them are on labour not only for their comfort, but for the necessities of life. I have slides illustrating all the chief industries and some of the minor ones, even to cricket-bat making. I take them down coal-mines and show them what kind of a life a miner has to lead before our eggs and bacon can be cooked. I draw comparisons between their own pocket-money and the earnings of many kinds of labourers. In short I do all I can to make them think vividly of what the underworld of toil is like, and to realize how the spectacle of the upper world of wealth, as reflected in the halfpenny papers,

must strike the toiler. If once they can be brought to understand this — to put themselves in the place of those others — things will be easier. Because it is a realization which they will never forget. I don't draw any moral. I don't suggest that there shall be an equal division of property or anything like that. For one thing, the schoolmasters wouldn't let me, and for another, I don't believe in equality. But I do drop a hint now and then that cricket and football are not all, and that the possession of riches carries with it a responsibility to the State."

"I should guess," I said, "that not the least of your difficulties in preparing your addresses is softening the adjectives. You must want to say so much more than you dare."

"O Heavens, yes!" he replied fervently. "I have the very deuce of a time with the blue pencil. And there are other troubles too. Some little while ago, for example, I was just rabid about a freak dinner that had been given in one of the big London restaurants, where some dancing girl was throned on a solid bank of roses that cost eight hundred pounds, and the musicians were seated in a *barca* that glided about a lake made for that evening only. There was a strike on at the time, and the contrast between this lavish rotten luxury on the one side and the destitution of the strikers' wives and children on the other was too extreme. In the old days when the poor couldn't read, or papers were too expensive, such dinners had a chance of being missed; but to-day everything is

made public and reaches even the poorest, and helps very properly to inflame them. That is one of the principal reasons why nothing is ever going to be the same any more.

"Well, anyhow, I found something to say about this, and said it with a certain amount of unambiguity. And what happened? The schoolmaster seemed at the time quite satisfied, but I received a letter from him later asking me not to come again. It appears, as I afterwards found out, that one of the givers of the feast was a notoriously rich Jew whose son was at the school. The son wrote home about it and the father threatened to take him away if any more such lectures were delivered. So there you are!

"But what I really want to see in force more than anything else," Spanton went on, "and these lectures of mine are really a kind of gentle preamble to the campaign, is compulsory manual labour for everybody. A kind of pacific conscription. Ruskin, you remember, set his undergraduates to make a road. They did it perhaps rather too much as a lark and not steadily or sweatily enough. I would catch the boys earlier and put them for one or two years to mining, building, engineering, digging, whatever it is, at the time when they would naturally be at the Universities or just entering office. That would enlarge their sympathies and give them the practical insight which is the next best thing to imagination. But the time for such a scheme is not yet."

"It seems to me," I said, "that your scheme might

go farther with enormously beneficial results. If to know all is to understand all, a system of interchange of employment and positions, carried out fully, would get into every section of society an understanding of the others. If the lady took a turn in the kitchen she would understand her cook's difficulties, while the cook in the dining-room would know for the first time what it felt like when the dishes were cold, underdone, or late. A bond would thus grow. Again, if the impatient patron of the restaurant had to take the waiter's napkin for a while, he would learn not only the reason of delay, but what it feels like to be spoken to like dirt, and the waiter, if he came in equally hungry and pressed for time, would appreciate the provocation to be sarcastic and rasping. And so on, right through society, until we all knew."

Spanton was pleased to say that my amendment was sensible; but it would not be very practicable, he thought. He has little humour, and no respect for it.

"And meanwhile," I asked, "what trade have you learned?"

He said he had learned none. He had been to Paris to learn painting; had given it up and become a convinced Socialist, and was now devoting himself to propaganda.

"But surely," I said, "it would be well, if only to strengthen your case, to put the plan into execution yourself. You are so young and you lay yourself open to the charge of inconsistency."

"I don't care about that," he said. "All Socialists

are inconsistent: that is the first thing to get into your head in any dealings with us. But we are not more inconsistent than Christians — that is, if Christ was a Christian, which one often doubts. My special line is clear thinking and persuasiveness, and one must do what one can do best."

"And meanwhile what of the great boon of life?" I said. "Is it not in danger, like unpopular bills, of being 'talked out'?"

He was silent. "Oh, well," he said at last, "perhaps I like talking best. I wonder. But it's constructive talk. You can't deny that."

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES IN THE BOSOM OF AN ENGLISH FAMILY AND WATCH A UTOPIAN IN LOVE

FOR some obscure reason Spanton has taken a fancy to me, and I must admit in return that I find something rather likeable in the scientific coolness of his mind and his dominating desire to see straight. Having taken a fancy to me, it follows that he wanted me to meet his betrothed, for although it naturally goes against his grain to do anything so conventional and banal as to be engaged, with the prospect of a legalized union in the future, human nature has been too much for him, and rather than lose his Nancy he has agreed to her father's very moderate wishes as regards an engagement and a registrar. But I need hardly say that he has given her no ring. In fact, his only presents to her so far, I understand, are a typewriter and a pair of sandals.

Nancy is a Miss Freeland, one of a family of girls who live a few miles out of London in a roomy Georgian house, with a large untidy garden, near Richmond.

The first words that I heard on entering the Freelands' hall told me instantly that I was among a twentieth-century household: "Oh, father, don't be such an ass!"

The speaker — Jocelyn, a pretty girl in a soft Liberty dress — at once broke away to welcome her prospective brother-in-law, who was there humanized to Bob, and his friend; and Mr. Freeland laid his hard case before us.

"Tell me," he said, "is a man and a father an ass because he thinks that one visit to the theatre a week is enough for a growing girl of fifteen?"

I was hesitating in my reply when another of the daughters came to the rescue.

"I know what Mr. Falconer will say," she said: "he will say that he has always made it a point never to interfere in disputes between relations. But Bob's not like that. Bob's never so happy as when he can set relatives disputing; aren't you, Bob?"

Nancy here entered the room, bringing the number of the unmarried sisters to seven. She is the only one who is engaged, and is twenty-two. Jocelyn is older; the rest younger. Nancy is pretty too, but less pretty than Jocelyn. The married daughter is a Mrs. Gosling, of whom Jocelyn wickedly says that her husband is the only one of her suitors who has not married well.

At lunch-time Mrs. Freeland appeared, an easy-going, smiling lady, and we all sat down to a vast table covered with food and noisy with chatter. The

great joke of the day — and in such families as these, where chaff is the grain of life (if I may so express it), each day produces its new joke — was their father's recent cleverness in the matter of the garden-party costume.

"Have you heard," Jocelyn asked me, "father's absolutely topping idea?" and entered upon the history; but beneath the Freeland roof no narrator is permitted to get to the end of anything unaided. Every story is composite. This one ran something like this.

"You see," Jocelyn began, "we all had an invitation to Lady Sydney's garden-party; and father wanted to go, but didn't know what to wear."

"Because," Mona explained, "it wasn't an ordinary garden-party. It was in connection with father's great educational scheme."

"Yes," said Mr. Freeland, "if there had been a nice little word like Tennis in the corner I should have had no qualms, but have gone in flannels, swinging a racket. But there wasn't, and a number of influential people were going to be there, largely to talk to me."

"Swank!" whispered Joan.

"So father turned on his wisdom-of-the-serpent tap," said Jocelyn, "with a vengeance. He began by dressing in tweeds with a straw hat."

"Don't forget the white slip and spats," said Phillida.

"Yes, and white spats. They're so white that

beetles and other creeping things are blinded. It's like flashes of lightning down there."

"Oh, get on!" said Mona. "Let me tell Mr. Falconer."

"I assure you," said Mr. Freeland to me, "it's the tamest story you ever heard. The only chance of its being made attractive is for me to tell it."

"Well," said Jocelyn, "that was what he wore. But he also put into the car a complete suit of the tail-coat and top-hat variety, and then Harris and he drove off. The rest of us had to get there as best we could in a fleet of cabs. Well, Harris and he drove off and pulled up outside the party gates to see the others go in and count the straw hats and the top hats."

"It was very awkward," Mr. Freeland put in, "at first, because they came out equal. But then the toppers began to make the running, and when they were about six lengths ahead I decided that that was good enough, and so we turned into a narrow lane close by ——"

"Where" — Jocelyn took it up again — "father changed."

"You see," Mona explained, "he'd started with his tweeds and straw hat."

"Mr. Falconer knows that," said Jocelyn.

"You can't make it too clear," Mona replied. "The whole story depends on that."

"Well," Jocelyn went on, her face kindling with excitement, "he had no sooner changed and got

nicely into his tail coat and things — and he really can look quite decent, although to-day you wouldn't think it —"

"My dear," said Mrs. Freeland, "you mustn't say things like that. Your father always looks nice."

"Not in his green jodelling hat, anyway," said Mona. "No one can defend that honestly."

"I like it very much," said Mrs. Freeland.

"Of course," said Janet, "but then you're his wife. We're not."

"Anyway," Jocelyn went on, "father and Harris ——"

"Harris is the chauffeur," said Joan.

"— were patting each other on the back for being so jolly artful, when what do you think happened?"

"Father, you tell," said Nancy, who has an eye for drama.

Mr. Freeland at once struck in. "This is what happened," he said. "Another car turned into the same lane and pulled up just round the corner, and, peeping through the trees, to our horror we observed a gentleman in a tall hat and morning coat stand up in it and begin changing into a straw hat and tweeds. I pass over the extraordinary coincidence that two guests should have hit upon an identical device to find out the correct thing to do ——"

"And we pass over too," said Jocelyn, "father's terrible discovery that the neighbourhood contained another man as brilliant as himself."

"— and simply ask you to conceive of Harris's and

my feelings. For if this other man was right we were wrong."

"Yes," said Mona; "but if he was wrong you were right."

"Exactly," I said.

"Very well, then," continued Mr. Freeland, "I instantly made up my mind."

"Napoleon at six stone," said Janet.

"'There is only one thing to do,' I said. 'I can't change again. We're too late as it is. We must therefore get there first. To follow this man in, in his vulgar clothes, would be a serious blunder.' So with infinite difficulty and the most perfect tact — carefully turning our heads from his quaint occupation (as though the lanes of England were meant to be dressing-rooms!) — we scraped past him, taking, I am pleased to say, a little varnish off his mudguard, and were away before his braces were properly fastened."

"There," said Jocelyn, "don't you think that a masterly move?"

"I do," I said.

"All brain work," said Mona.

"And when you were among the people," I said, "did you find that tall hats prevailed?"

"Absolutely," said Mr. Freeland.

"I counted them," said Jocelyn. "There were eighty-five straws, with tweeds or flannels; a hundred and ten tall hats; and forty-three Homburgs. Some of the Homburgs were worn with tail coats, so father

could have taken his instead of his topper if he had liked."

"Thank Heaven he didn't!" said Janet.

"My dear Janet," said Mrs. Freeland, "how can you?"

There was also, I need hardly say, a joke against Mrs. Freeland. Herself the most temperate of women, she had lately been presented with an Aberdeen terrier named Whisky. Like all Aberdeens, he was just a mass of original sin, and naturally the last thing he would do on a walk was to keep near his mistress. The result was, as Jocelyn informed me with the keenest zest, that the neighbourhood had suddenly become painfully aware of Mrs. Freeland's repeated calls for whisky, ranging from the pathetic to the urgent, and was drawing its conclusions accordingly.

"Yes," said Joan, "poor father, the dipsomaniac's husband!"

I hope to see more of the Freelands, for life goes very easily among them, and it is amusing to be among so many fresh, unsophisticated young things, growing like grass upon the weir. It is one of those families where the skeleton seems never to leave the cupboard, and it is tonic to visit these now and then. Very different from the houses where it is the family that lives in the cupboard and one meets only the skeleton.

Spanton as a lover differs radically from Dollie Heathcote. Dollie lets his Ann go her own way

and rather admires her for it; but Spanton is the influencing moulding type. The last infirmity of modern man, some one has said, is to force women to give up their sex; and Spanton is indulging it. His one idea is to make his Nancy not only a man, but another Spanton. He controls her. He arranges both her clothes and her reading. Being only an ordinary English girl, with no experience and a great joy and pride in being engaged, she has fallen in with his every suggestion, to the great disgust of her sisters. Gradually and surely she is ceasing to have any common ground with them; which is of course very foolish, for Spanton is not making her better, but merely different. Her Spantonisms are only veneer; the sound Freeland stock remains, and will remain underneath, although for the time being it is invisible.

"When half-gods go the gods arrive," says the poet. But it isn't generally true. More accurate would it be to say, "When gods arrive the half-gods go." That is a phenomenon which most families have witnessed and the Freeland family are witnessing now. Before the advent of the god Spanton, Nancy had been loyal to her sisters' and their friends' enthusiasms. She had had local heroes too — this cricketer, that tennis-player. But Spanton, although he may not be so proficient, has the only right way of behaving at these games, or else he despises them; while when it comes to the arts, he leads by lengths. Nancy used, for example, to be rather keen on musical

comedy; but Spanton being all for Shaw, farewell to Gertie Millar. Nancy used to go to the Academy every May and revel in it; but Spanton believing only in the New Englishmen, farewell to the Hon. John Collier. And so it is, all over this little island.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THERE IS TROUBLE IN THE HOUSE OF WILES OWING TO A HUSBAND ONCE AGAIN GETTING HIS OWN WAY

NAOMI has had a letter from Mrs. Wiles saying that she was in trouble and badly in need of advice, and would Mrs. Falconer be so kind as to call. We therefore went round in the afternoon and found the millionairess in tears.

"Wiles will be here directly," she said. "He's just gone out for some medicine."

"No one's seriously ill, I hope?" I said.

"Well, I don't know," she replied. "But you remember, ma'am, what you said about adopting a child. We talked that over and over, and Wiles didn't seem to care about it at first, and then all of a sudden he got brighter and thought it was a good idea. Only, 'Leave it to me,' he kept saying; 'I'll do it.' Well, I know Wiles has his wits about him most times, but when it comes to adopting a child, why, there I think that the choice ought to have been mine. It's woman's work, anyway, especially as it's me who would have to look after it, or so I thought. But Wiles, he only laughed, funny like,

and wouldn't hear of it. 'Leave it to me,' he kep' on saying. And what do you think? Yesterday the baby came; and what do you think it is? Why, not a Christian at all, but a baby chimpanzee. I'll admit it's not a monkey; that's something gained; but I don't know how to hold me head up, all the same. Look at the degrasion of it! What can the neighbours say? Because of course they'll think it's just a monkey. And in our position! Here we are, come into money and moving into a nice house, with a servant, and getting rid of the Zoo and all its fleas once and for ever, as I thought, and now to have it all beginning again and another of those creatures brought into the very house where we eat and sleep: that is if ever I, for one, will sleep again! Never did I think to see my own back-kitchen a menagerie."

At this moment Wiles came in, looking a little self-conscious, but important too. "Ah," he said, "I can see what the missis has been saying, but don't you take any notice of her. She'll be all right. Come and see my Lou," and he led us to the back-kitchen, where a timid and distrustful chimpanzee huddled in a corner. "That's her, that's my Lou," he said. "That's our adopted child, ma'am. She's got a touch of bronchitis, I'm afraid, and I've been getting some medicine. But she ought to be all right here, with me to look after her. Why, I feel another man already. Something to do again."

Lou was a picture of melancholy and suspicion as her new father poured out a spoonful of the linctus;

but it was syrupy and she took it with pleasure. "There," he said, as she finished the dose, "my little girl isn't going to die of pneumonia. She's going to get strong and learn some good tricks, isn't she?"

"Tricks!" said Mrs. Wiles. "You know what that means: shaking hands, eating with a spoon, pretending to read the paper. Nothing worth doing. Nothing like a nice little orphan girl who would be a companion and a pleasure to us and go to a cinema now and then. I'm so disappointed."

"Well," I said, "there's time. It's only Wiles having his adopted child first. Your turn next. That's fair, isn't it, Wiles?"

"We'll leave it at that for the present," said Wiles, pointing to an illuminated card on the wall. "That's our motto," he added.

I am always attracted by stories of what might be called beneficent error, and this gesture of Wiles's gave me a perfect example. To my eyes and to ninety-nine observers out of a hundred the device, which ran thus,

NOT NOW

represented nothing in the world but the text, "No Cross, no Crown." Judge, then, of my astonishment when Mrs. Wiles supplemented her husband's remark by saying: "Yes, we've had a lot of comfort out of those words in our day. 'Not now.' Later, it'll be all

right. There's a better time coming. But it isn't quite ripe yet, so pull yourselves together and wait cheerfully. Wiles had it given him by an aunt of his, who was a very pious body, and it always puzzled us why she shouldn't have sent something more religious. But, as it happens, nothing religious could have helped us more, could it, Wiles? 'Not now.'"

Naturally I said nothing to them about it, but I have been wondering since what difference it would have made had they known all along that "No Cross, no Crown" was the true reading. Once they accepted the full meaning of the phrase, none, I suppose; for "No Cross, no Crown" and "Not now" come to mean the same thing in the end. But it is an amusing confusion, and not the least amusing part of it is the circumstance that two poets at any rate have toiled to combine words that would convey the same ideas, while all the time such a commonplace and terse locution as "Not now" could have done it all. For what more does Pope's famous couplet say:

> Hope springs eternal in the human breast,
> Man never is, but always to be, blest?

or "Rabbi Ben Ezra's" beautiful line:

> Grow old along with me: the best is yet to be?

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH THE FIRST-FLOOR-FRONT UNFOLDS AND SOME OF THE SECRETS OF A REMARKABLE INDUSTRY ARE LAID BARE

MR. LACEY has now introduced me to Mr. Furley, with whom he divides the first floor, and whom we hear moving restlessly about overhead at all hours. On my mentioning this habit to him he said that he always walked when he was inventing. Asked what he was inventing, he said film stories. For Mr. Furley not only makes pictures of real events, which is the staple of his odd business, but devises dramas too. He has bought an estate near London, in Essex, where walled gardens with fine trees in them are so plentiful and cheap, and here he has erected a huge crystal palace for indoor photography as well as having natural surroundings for open-air episodes. Here, too, he has formed a stock company of actors and actresses to perform his plays.

Mr. Furley sent a message in one fine morning to say that he had a drama in the making that day, and would I like to see it. I said I would, and we were soon dashing off to his suburb in his motor-car.

We turned into the gateway of his estate, and there

among the trees was a Red Indian encampment with a number of tethered horses — only a few yards from a busy High Street with electric trams in it. Cowboys on ponies waited near by, and an excited manager was shouting through a megaphone while the camera clicked off its myriad impressions. The whole effect was strangely bizarre, and I must admit it struck me as desperately silly. At least it seemed desperately silly that in a few days' time thousands of my countrymen all over England, and later, thousands of people all over the rest of the world, were going to pay to have their feelings worked up by such cynically manufactured heroics.

"I had no idea," I said, "that these cowboy dramas were made in England."

"Bless your heart, why not?" said Mr. Furley. "Nearly everything can be done in England. A background of trees in Essex is enough like a background of trees in Texas to satisfy most people. It's the movement and the humanity that they look at; they don't criticize. As a matter of fact, the cinema won't let them—it's too hypnotic. It lulls you."

The cowboys having done their scene, a cardboard room was quickly erected and the unhappy heroine sat in it to receive a visit from a drunken lover whom she was to reclaim from whisky. There were but three walls, and the two side ones were set at an obtuse angle to the back.

"You wouldn't think when you see these things on the screen," said Mr. Furley, "that the fourth wall is

the world itself, with the camera in the midst. We build up the three walls in the open air for the most part, and keep the actors in focus by means of those long strips of wood on the ground, over which they mustn't step. When they are ready we take them, but they have been rehearsing a long time. Some words, you notice, are being spoken or the time would be wrong and the actions wouldn't fit; we don't ask them to learn anything by heart, but merely get the sense. No actor need ever retire into private life any more because his memory or voice has gone: the cinema will employ him.

"There's nothing you can't do with the cinema," he said. "For instance, suppose I want to show you run over by a steam-roller. I could do it so thoroughly as to make your wife shriek. First of all, I place you here and then the roller advances on you. I take photographs until the roller touches you. Then I stop the camera, lay on the floor a dummy figure, and take the roller advancing over that. I stop the camera again and place on the floor a brown-paper shape like a pressed-out man and I take the roller just passing off that. Then a lot of people crowd in, and I stop it while you take your place on the ground in the middle of them, and then I turn the wheel again and we see you restored to life. When the picture is exhibited it runs straight on as if there had been no breaks at all; but the breaks do it. It's the art of leaving out. The camera's good for anything; it's the new ideas that we want.

"Another thing we want is English actors and actresses with a sense of gesture. The idiots, they stand there and deliver their speeches as if they were posts, and how do you suppose that comes out on the film? The result is that we have to get foreigners for all the best plays — Italians first of all — because they move their hands while they are speaking and convey their meaning. Our own actors can do certain things all right, but not the best emotional things, and the result is I'm now writing a series of purely English plays where only English stolidity is needed. Then they'll be at home."

Mr. Furley showed me how some of the trick films are made. For example, one in which a box of bricks opened automatically, the bricks came out and built themselves into a house, and then unbuilt themselves and returned to the box.

"It's on the single picture principle," he said. "One picture at a time and then they're reeled off as if they were taken continuously, like views of the opening of Parliament and so forth. Suppose this is the box of bricks and you want that brick to come out of it by itself and stand itself on end. You take a piece of thread so fine as to be invisible and fasten it to the brick. Then you lift the brick an infinitesimal way and that is photographed; a little more, and another photograph; a little more, and another; and so on. Perhaps before that brick is on end sixty separate pictures have had to be made, and so on with the others. The film may take five minutes to

exhibit; and it has required two weeks of ten-hour days to make.

"Historical scenes are still popular in some places," he said. "But you have to be careful how you do them. The public doesn't want them exact, but exact in the way it has always thought of them. For instance, I wanted to do an execution of Mary Queen of Scots, so I went to the British Museum to see contemporary pictures. But do you think I could use them? Not a bit of it. The public, accustomed to think of Mary as they have seen her in so many modern paintings, wouldn't have stood it. So I went to the modern painters instead and got some good ideas. But it isn't the real thing. Executions are always popular. The women like it. And a sad story — Jane Shore, Amy Robsart, the Princes in the Tower, Charles the First — you can't go wrong with those.

"But as a matter of fact, I hold that whatever you give the public now will do, because they've got the cinema habit. The films change every Monday and Thursday in most halls. Well, every Monday and every Thursday you see the same people roll up. If it's a good set, they tell their friends it's good and perhaps come again themselves. If it's a bad set they say nothing but hope for better luck next time. The one thing they can't do is to stay away. The cinema's got them."

As I looked over this strange place and heard Mr. Furley's explanations, ideas as to the further possi-

bilities of the cinema crowded into my mind. Its educational advantages, for example, are remarkable, and a day will certainly come when most schools will have a machine for exhibiting films. The most delicate physiological processes can be recorded: the evolution of the butterfly from the egg; the hatching of chickens; and so forth — all making a biology lesson as fascinating as a romance. Every science can in fact be humanized by this invention, and school children actually see the world in the act of growing. My own particular hobby just now, too — folk dancing — how easily the cinema could help that, by reproducing the steps and movements so exactly as to make teachers almost unnecessary.

Geography again — how vastly more entertaining a lesson would be if the scholar was taken for a short trip through the country that was under examination. London in the early days of the cinema had several halls where only scenery was shown; and they were very popular. To-day the taste has declined and everyone wants melodrama. But those old topographical films are not lost and they would be priceless for quickening the imagination of the young at school.

I made some of these suggestions to Mr. Furley, but he was not enthusiastic. He is a serious man with taste, but he does not let that interfere with his business. "In our trade," he said, "you must give the public what they want. People like you come to me and say, 'Why don't you raise the tone of the

films and make them more instructive?' But I want to retire, and in order to do that I must make money. I used to have a notion once that I would be ahead of the time, but I've given that up. The fact is, the cinema managers who buy my films won't let me. They decide what the public want, or the public want what they decide: I'm not sure which it is, but whichever it is, there's no chance for much that isn't vulgar. After the real events, and now and then a landscape film, everything has to be either passionate or comic."

"Well," I said, "the time must surely come, and soon, when the cinema will begin to need brains. All this sham stuff will fatigue and the real thing will have a chance. If you take my advice you will try to be in the van. As it is, I feel sure that London could stand one hall at any rate where something better was given. There are such possibilities. Satire, for example, never had such an ally. Think how deadly at political meetings could a film be which depicted the rival candidate in ridiculous situations! Think of what Socialism might gain from a series of views of the stately homes of England and their idle plutocratic owners at play! Think of the way in which the cinema could fortify and supplement the work of the illustrated papers! No, you are only just beginning, and it is absurd for you to talk of retiring yet. For every ten camera films you make, to satisfy the stupid public, you ought to make one good one for your conscience's sake."

But Mr. Furley only laughed. "You don't know the ignorant buyers I have to deal with," he said.

"Then open theatres of your own," I urged.

"Not for anything," he replied. "No, I want to get out of it all. It's getting on my nerves. I can't sleep. My eyes have turned into lenses and my brain into a camera, and I see everything like that. Nothing but farming will do me any good, and I want to get to my farm as soon as I can and stop there. When I'm talking to people — as it might be you now — I find myself all ready to swear at them for not being more animated. I search the papers for the death of kings, because there's nothing so popular as royal funerals. I'm a lost soul."

No one who has not gone into the matter has any notion of what an industry has sprung up around the cinema. There is first of all the photographer, who must be supplied with materials, not the least of which is, annually, many miles of celluloid film. This film has to be made, and factories came into being to do nothing but make it. Passing over the other photographic accessories, we come to the buildings, where the dramas are enacted, the actors who perform, the costumes, horses, motor-cars, and scenery which they require, and the managers who rehearse them — often day after day for hours before the few minutes occupied by the final photography. Then the development and reproduction of the film, its sale to various syndicates that control the cinema shows of the world, and its exhibition in the theatres them-

selves, all day long, for three days only, in each, for the delectation of the thousands of spectators. And the whole thing isn't more than fourteen years old.

I made some remark to this effect.

"Oh," said Mr. Furley, "the cinema industry's nothing here compared with America. There they take it seriously. Expensive actors and actresses are retained, large tracts of country are rented, and the activity is prodigious. In Italy and France too they pay immense salaries to their funny men and huge fees to dramatists to devise scenarios. Here we pay next to nothing, and if possible nothing at all. One can get all the plots we want out of our heads or old novelettes. I have a man always at work reading old novelettes for plots."

England, my England!

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH MRS. DUCKIE DISCUSSES THE DUTIES OF LIFE, AND MR. BEMERTON INTRODUCES ME TO CERTAIN VILLAGE PESSIMISTS

FOR old sake's sake I look in now and then on Mr. Bemerton and bring away a book, and recently I exchanged a few words with Mrs. Duckie, who is now very lonely by day, Be-trice having gone on to the music-hall stage under the name of Lazie Glee, a serio-comic singer, and Ern having thrown up a situation in a garage in order to join a troupe in the same profession who are known as "The Four Uglies."

Mrs. Duckie naturally began by asking after my young lady. "The pretty dear," she said, "I hope she's well, and that you're comfortable where you are. Sorry we were to lose you. And are there any little ones? Not yet — but there will be, I hope and trust. Such a sweet lady and such a nice gentleman, it would be a sin not to have any. So many people to-day aren't having any, and I call it a crying shame. But you're not like that. There must be one little Master Falconer at any rate, if not two,

and a little Miss Falconer as well. One of each is best. Single children get spoiled and too clever too: no give-and-take and always hearing their parents talk; not good for a child. No, a noisy nursery is best, with a good quarrel now and then. That's the way to make men and women. The next time you call I hope you'll be able to bring the good news," the honest creature concluded.

She went on—without interruption—to talk of her own family. "Why all my children should be so bitten by the music halls I can't think," she remarked mournfully. "I never cared for the places myself, and my husband is all for serious music when he gets the chance; while their grandfather on their father's side was a local preacher, and my father, God bless him, as quiet a man as you'd find anywhere, and so little ear that he didn't know the 'Old Hundredth' from 'Home, Sweet Home.' It just shows what a wonderful thing this heredity is. I suppose there must have been someone in the family somewhere who was more skittish. Of course one never knows all about anyone. Perhaps Duckie's father sang a bit loose before he took to religion."

"Your mother didn't sing?" I asked.

"No, bless her heart, she didn't. But I've heard her say, now I come to think of it, that her mother was famous in 'Sir Roger.' Perhaps that's where it all started. But it makes me very unhappy. There's Be-trice now, these two houses a night just wear her out. And Ern calling himself an 'Ugly,' it's dreadful.

Such a pretty child as he was too, with fair curls down to his shoulders. I don't know what the world's coming to."

I asked after Mr. Duckie.

"He's very well," said Mrs. Duckie, "but tired. Always on his poor feet, you know. He's got a great idea of finding someone with a little money to join him in starting an eating-house of his own, and though of course it's very risky I almost wish he could; for he's getting on in years and it's a shame he should spend his whole life in making money for someone else. I wonder if you know of anyone with a little capital, sir?"

"I'll think about it," I said, at once remembering both the unoccupied Mr. Wiles and Lacey's cold chop scheme.

Mr. Bemerton was somewhat depressed too. Old-book buying, he said, was declining steadily. Reprints were hitting him very hard, but the love of pleasure harder. People spent their money now on entertainment and food, where they once used not only to dine at home but sit at home all the evening reading. Now if they sat at home they played bridge. He wouldn't be so pessimistic as to say that England was going to the dogs, but he would like to see something happen to make us pull ourselves together. His niece, Miss Waghorn, had left him. Married a mild young man in a hosier's, ten years her junior, and the pair of them reminded Mr. Bemerton of nothing so much as a cruet: oil and

vinegar. "But I dare say they'll mix," he said. "They met in a lodging-house at Margate: nothing like such places to settle one's hash. With no home comforts one gets desperate for company, and then Cupid begins to shoot.

"I've got a little book for you," said Mr. Bemerton, "that I've been keeping till you came in. A privately printed one. It would be too much to say that they are the best books, but they often have a quality that the others haven't. Sometimes of course they're merely the result of vanity, but here and there, as in the present case, they contain a very special kind of record, such as a modest observer with a humorous sense of character might like to preserve for her friends but not wish the world at large to see, lest perhaps some of the simple folk described in the pages might get to know of it and be hurt."

Mr. Bemerton, who had been turning a little volume over and over in his hands all this time, while mine were stretched out and withdrawn and again outstretched to take it, here opened it.

"It's the modestest little thing," he said. "Just a few pages of talk among villagers in the Midlands; but it's a jewel of literature. Among its very great admirers when it appeared was Mr. Gladstone. Now, I've only one copy and I can't get another; but I'll lend it to you. You must treat it as if it were a black pearl."

I have done so and allowed no one but Naomi to see it. It is a strange little book and might well

cease to be private, although one likes to think of a few good things being withheld from the world at large. Miss A., the author or recorder of these conversations, was an invalid lady living in the country, to whom her humble neighbours were a perpetual joy; she helped them, she sympathized with them, and she laughed at their little foibles afterwards. In these pages she has preserved certain of their odd speeches, the period being chiefly early in the eighteen sixties. But the type is eternal.

Although we meet several characters in the book, most of them have a family resemblance in that they have had a hard time, and expect nothing better, and do not always make the best of it. No doubt Miss A. had neighbours who were more optimistic or less sardonic; but to her these did not appeal as those others did. All artists have preferences in types, and the humorous grumbler was hers. But it is not discontent that gives this little book its unity; it is marriage. Almost every page touches upon that imperfect state, so that by the end an impressionable reader would as soon think of entering the bonds as of sitting voluntarily in the electrocuting chair; that is, if marriage did not chance to be the one hazard in the world from which no one person can withhold another.

Here are Miss A. and Mary Powell, a labourer's wife, together, in Mary Powell's cottage, as reported by Miss A.:

Miss A. "How have you and John agreed together since I left Bewley?"

Mary. "Well, ma'am, those words of yours when we parted have hacted very well. 'Mary,' says you, 'when John's in a bad temper you be in a good 'un; for it's both on you being in a bad temper together as does the mischief.' So mony a time when he's contraried me I've said to myself, 'Now I'll be on Miss A.'s plan;' and we've had nothing but bits of houts since — never no fighting — and a very good thing we've left it off. For, ye see, a man's hand falls very heavy on a woman, and mony a time I've been black and blue; only he was a deal more careful where he hit me at after he had that seven-and-sixpence to pay for them leeches to my side. You remember it, don't you, ma'am? I'd been saying summat again his mother — he calls her all to pieces himself, only he wunna let me — so he knocked me hoff the chair, and it caused himplamation; and fine and foolish John looked when the doctor shook his head at him. But he niver said he was sorry; he's too stupid for that."

Miss A. "Have you taken my advice on the other point — about going to church?"

Mary. "Well, ma'am, I did go twice after my brother died; but I can scarce ever find time, betwixt waiting on the cow, and the pig, and John — and he taks as much as t'other two put together; he won't so much as reach out his hand to reach hisself a cup or a saucer. I gets up at four o'clock on Sundays to milk cow, and then there's John's boots to be blacked, and a deal of mud scraped off 'em first, and breakfast to get in time for him to go to chapel at

nine (and he scolds me finely if he's late), and then pig to be fed and our dinner to get. I said to John one Sunday, when he'd been saying, 'Woman, thou'lt go to Fire and Brimstone as sure as thou'rt born, for thou niver goest to church nor chapel;' 'Very well,' says I, 'then thou must feed pig thyself to-day.' 'I'll let him starve first,' says John; and, sure enough, pig would have starved if I had na' crep out at night to feed him. So when I come back I thought I'd have it out wi' John, so I says, 'I'm not a bit likelier to go to Fire and Brimstone than thou art, with all thy blaating and praying; and as for them Methodies, I hates 'em, with all them collections, sixpence here and sixpence there; and I have read in a book that John Wesley did not improve of their axing folks for money.' So John says quite scornful, 'I wonder where you got that much larning, woman.' 'When I had the hopportunity,' I says quite scornful back again. You know, Miss A., I'd read it in a book as was full of all manner of things about railroads and such like. I suppose, ma'am, you've seen London Bridge. Eh! dear, what a place it must be! They say the railway carriages, and carriages and cabs with horses, are all running together upon the rails, and it's nothing but them pints as keeps them from all being smashed together."

Again, two years later:

Miss A. "How have you and John been getting on since I saw you?"

Mary. "Pretty well; indeed, I darsna fly into them passions; the doctor says it'll be present death if I do. Mine is the white passions as drives the blood hinwards and causes bad palpulation at the heart. Mr. Walker, the doctor, come in one day just as I'd knocked John back'ards at the door for coming in with dirty shoes just when I'd been two hours on my hands and knees cleaning the floor; but, you know, Miss A., a hot temper is naterally grounded in me. My mother had a hawful temper; I've seen her empty a shovel full of hot ashes on my father's head. Now, I won't say but what I've thrown a ash or two at John, but they've been could 'uns; and one day my mother snatched up a gown as I had been buying for myself, and put it on the fire, and her said, 'There now, and next time I'll put you on the fire too, if you buy finery without my jurydiction.' Eh! how I cried when I see'd them beautiful pink and yallow stripes kindling; but her was a good mother at the root for all her was so strict; and when I sees girls nowadays fithered and flounced up, and pomped out so as when they comes swelling along one's obliged to get out o' the road, I often thinks to myself, it's a pity there's not some mothers in Bewley like mine. John often says to me, 'Thou'rt the very model of thy mother, Mary, temper and all.' 'Yes, John,' says I, 'and didn't her warn thee that I'd a foul temper; and didn't thee say, like a big fool, "I wull have her, temper and all." Thou conceitedst thou couldst master me, but thou hast larnt different.' 'I have

that,' said John. He often fetches texes out of Scripture about women doing their juties, to clench me with, and he knows it taks me a long time to pick out a tex to clench him with. There was no natteral schools whin I was yong."

The next year:

Mary. "I hope you're better of the lombagger, Miss A. John had it wunst, and he was cured with some stuff he got gracious from Doctor Woods; it was uncommon strong, for he could feel it playing back'ards and forrards about his heart afore it went down. John's mother is dead at last, but she lay a long while; you know sick folks canna go hoff unless they're kept nice and clean; I'll be ound her'd have died a deal sooner if I'd had the tending of her, because I should always have been fettling and washing of her. For all her'd been so wicked, her died like a good 'un, and said her was going to Glory; but I'm partly of your opinyan, Miss A., that according as folks live, so they'll die."

So much for Mary Powell. Now for Anne Williams:

Miss A. "I think you seem as cheerful as ever."

Anne. "Yes! as Mary James says, I'm always at the top o' the tree, and so I ought to be, for the Lord has been very good to me. You would not have conceited as He would listen to the prayers of a poor hignorant woman like me, but I've pruven

as He did; for many a time as my husband has rampaged out of the house door like a lion, I've felled on my knees, and he's come back like a lamb. I never used to tell him what it was as had peacified him, because I knew that 'ud cause him to break out worse till ever; and now when he's a bit for wrangling, I only just say, 'Daniel, we wasn't paired to tear up one another's minds, but to live comfortable.' I should like you to see my youngest girl; she's not out o' the way handsome, for you know, ma'am, I'm hard-featured, and Daniel is long-featured (though he looks pretty well when he's tidied up a bit), but she has the loveliest tongue for a child of two and a half as ever anybody heard. Whatever we say, long or short, she has it in a minute, and specially if there's a bad word said she's sure not to miss it; and then, if I hoffer to beat her, her'll cry out, 'If mother beats Hemma, Hemma'll tell daddy, and then daddy'll beat mother'; really, I say such an admyrable little creatur is more than nateral. I shall be taking her with me to chapel by-and-bye; we attends the Primities."

Miss A. "Are those the Ranters?"

Anne. "Oh! no, ma'am, the Ranters jump, and the Primities only shouts. I don't hold with jumping myself, though to be sure wasn't it St. Paul — oh no, it was King David — as danced before the ark? The shouting is a realality, depend upon it, Miss A., for you know when the facts of the Lord works into one's inside one cannot help but shout."

The next cottage is a stonemason's. The stonemason is ill and his wife receives the visitor:

"My husband is very bad indeed, ladies; indeed, I thought it was a done job with him last week, and him unconvarted yet. He was very near getting his convarsion last winter; he came in from the public one Saturday night near ten o'clock, and he says to me, 'Anne, it's plain enough thy prayers isn't strong enough for me, and I'm determined to try what they can do for me at Cresbrook Chapel, and we'll set out this very night, to be ready for the meeting in the morning.' So we set out, and as we passed the Nag's Head I could hear him saying, 'Be off with ye,' — that was to the Devil, you know, ladies. It was twelve o'clock when we got to Cresbrook to my mother's; and as soon as morning came my husband said, 'I'll go to cousin Jane, as has axed me so often to go to chapel, and if her axes me again, I'll go.' So he went, but her never axed him, so I took it that the Lord had not appinted this time for Ned, so we come home again, and he soon took to drink worse than ever; but he's better to me than he used to be, for when I knelt down to say my prayers he'd often pull me up again by the roots of my hair. He's coming downstairs now, ladies. Ned, thou must tell these ladies what ails thee, though they'll scarce understand such broad talk as thine, but thou must speak thy best and they'll excuse it."

Ned. "The doctor says the muscles of my liver is

set fast, and he ordered me a hot slivver bath to loosen 'em; so I borrowed one, and while I was in it two or three of the neighbours looked in, and they kept saying, 'Stop in a bit longer, lad, it'll fatch the grease out of thy boones;' so I stopped and stopped till I was well-nigh jead, and I have been going worse ever since."

Miss A. "Have you been subject to these attacks before?"

Ned. "Yes, ma'am, since I was a lad. I was 'prentice to my uncle, a stonmason, and one day when I was at the top of a ladder, thirty feet high, me and the big ston I was carrying come down together; and when I laid on the ground half-stunned, the first words my uncle said was, 'The ston's not brocken;' he never axed me if I was hurt, and as soon as I could move, he said, 'Up with it again, lad;' so I went, but afore I was half-way up I fainted right away, and fell to the ground with the ston atop of me that time, and I was in bed eleven weeks. My uncle was a bit of a rogue, but he grew to be quite a big sort of a man afterwards, and used to ax me to dinner, and very handsome victuals he set before me, but I niver felt right in the stomach till I'd said summat about the big ston. However, I niver said much, for I kept thinking to myself, 'The words as one has not yet spooken, one has got yet for to say.'"

And, lastly, here is an old Welsh widower:

Miss A. "I hear that you lost your wife ten years ago. You must have led a sad, lonely life since her death."

David. "Quite the other way, ma'am. I'd never no peace at all till she went. I prayed to the Lord night and day for thirty years that He would please to part us; but I left it to Him which way it should be. I was quite ready to go myself; but He took her at last, and right thankful I was indeed."

Miss A. "I suppose you were always quarrelling?"

David. "I had a hot temper enough before I was married; but when I see what an awful woman she was, I says to myself, 'Now, two fires cannot burn together;' and I grew as quiet as could be, and never contraried her no ways. But she was a most awful woman; indeed, she did throw a coffee-pot just off the fire at my head one day."

Miss A. "I hope she repented before she died."

David. "Indeed, I don't know. I did often say to her when she lay a-dying, 'My dear, I hope the Lord will forgive your sins; but I do not know as He will, for you have been a most awful woman indeed, my dear.'"

They ring very true, these grumbles, do they not? And they all add to the wish which so many reflective persons must have entertained at one time or other, that the Perfect Man had not narrowed His earthly experiences and diminished the variety of His example by remaining single.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH A JOVIAL PARTY JOIN ENGLAND'S ANNUAL SATURNALIA AND A NEW KNIGHT PHILOSOPHIZES ON HIS GREATNESS

NAOMI'S young friend Dollie Heathcote, who goes everywhere and does all the doggy things, as he calls them, was so shocked to find that I had never been to the Derby that, in order to save his reason, which seemed to be tottering under the blow, I said we would accompany him there, on condition that he took care of us.

"Very well, then," he said. "I'll make up a jolly party. Wow, wow!"

For some time past he has been including this insane exclamation in most of his remarks. From what I can understand, the intention is to signify that the speaker is capable of all — ready for any emergency, and particularly a convivial one.

"We go, I suppose, in a hearse," I said, when he came to announce that all the plans were settled.

"Great Heavens, no," replied Dollie. "That's all over. We go in a motor brake, and my friend Farrar's got a box for us in the Grand Stand."

"All right," I said. "But I always understood that one should go to the Derby in a hearse, wearing a green puggeree. You see, I was out of England so long, I don't really know."

"I hope you'll be able to bear up without your green puggeree next Wednesday," said Dollie, with real anxiety. These young men, for all their "wow-wows," are very scrupulous dressers and anxious company-keepers nowadays, I notice.

"I'll try," I said.

"But, look here," he added, "I don't want to bore you, you know, but I hope that when we're there you're all going to bet. You haven't any rotten objections, have you?"

I said that I knew of none. For my own part I would cheerfully put something on.

Dollie was immensely relieved. "That's all right, then," he said. "Racing without betting's like oysters without lemon. Some people pretend to like it for the sport only; but there isn't any sport. There's only a great, sweltering crowd that lasts for hours, and every half-hour a brown rush which lasts a second that you can't see because someone's in the the way. That's racing when you don't bet. But when you do bet it is interesting all the while. You don't notice the crowd and you do notice the merry little gees."

"But isn't betting very bad for people?" Naomi inquired.

"Bad for those who can't afford to be pipped,"

said Dollie, "yes. But I don't know that it's done me much harm. Whisky and soda instead of *vino veritas*, now and then, I'll admit; but when you chance to hop on to a winner, what ho, for the ancient vintage. The awful thing about betting," Dollie continued, "is, that no matter whether you lose or whether you win, you always reproach yourself. You always say, 'If only I'd done so and so.'"

"But you had what's called a tip, I suppose," said Naomi, with, I thought, strange knowledge.

"Yes, but a man who bets is always in two minds. That's the second tragic thing about it. The third is that he's always superstitious. I'll give you an instance. You've got a strong tip for a horse called Knucklebones. But there's another horse in it called Bobby. Well, you're just crossing the road to send a telegram to your bookie to back Knucklebones (or perhaps you've sent it), when a policeman grabs your arm and snatches you out of the way of a taxi. After that how can you possibly not back Bobby?"

"Why?" Naomi inquired blankly.

"Because of the policeman — Bobby — don't you see?"

"Poor things," said Naomi, with real anguish. "How difficult you make life for yourselves, and how sorry we ought to be for you. I never thought before how racing men suffer. And some people are so down on them too!"

"Oh," said Dollie, "if you want to pity us I can

give you plenty more material. If you only knew what I suffer before I send the telegrams. Which bookie to send to, for example. If I lost the last time, I wonder whether I hadn't better change to another; for everyone has more than one. And then the post offices: which one to go to, because some have been luckier than others. And even which hand to take the stamps with when you lick them on."

"Poor Dollie, poor Dollie," said Naomi.

"And then," Dollie continued, "think what it must be to have a tip for a horse and put your shirt on it in a telegram, and then, not long before the race, meet another man whose information is usually good who gives you a totally different tip! There's misery for you!"

"And what do you do?" Naomi asked.

"Do?" said Dollie. "Nothing, only suffer and wait for the result. Haven't you ever watched men's faces after they've bought the evening paper? Some men with a lot at stake daren't look at the paper at all in the street. I've carried a paper about for an hour, myself, before I could bring myself to learn the worst."

"Poor Dollie," said Naomi, "and I have always thought you so frivolous."

"Few people have more serious times than I do," he replied. "Often I can't sleep at all wondering if I've done right about a gee. And then there's scratching."

"Dollie!" exclaimed Naomi reprovingly.

"No, no, I don't mean that," said Dollie. "Scratching means taking a horse out of a race beforehand. If you've backed him and then he's scratched, you lose your money just as if he had run and lost."

"I don't think that's fair," said Naomi.

"Well, it's the rule anyhow," said Dollie.

"Don't tell me any more," said Naomi. "I shall get you on my mind and lose my sleep too. But answer just this one question. It's about the saying 'If only I'd done so and so.' How is it that all you poor dears say that if you win as well as if you lose?"

"Well, if you lose," said Dollie, "you say, 'If only I'd backed that other gee instead;' but if you win you say, 'If only I'd put on a tenner instead of a fiver.' Don't you see? You can't get away from it. The words 'If only I'd' are engraven on every betting man's heart."

"Then really I almost wonder you don't give up betting," Naomi replied.

"Give up betting? Good Heavens! You must do something," said Dollie, in alarm. "How could one get through the day without a little flutter? I don't mean at the races only, but in town? It just keeps you going. You pick out your fancies in the morning, and then you go on buying the evening papers all through the day. That's life."

"I am afraid I have sadly misspent mine," I said. "I haven't had a bet for thirty years."

"We must get you into good habits again on Wednesday," said Dollie.

The ride to the Derby was amusing, but to have chartered a motor was the height of foolishness. The motor's recommendation is its speed; but owing to the congestion of the road we rarely proceeded above a walking pace after the first few miles. As a matter of fact, a donkey barrow with three passengers kept ahead of us for an hour.

Dollie had charge of the party. With him was Ann Ingleside; Algy Farrar and his wife Gwen, whom it appeared Naomi had known and liked at school; Naomi; I; and, to my great pleasure, Ann's father, Sir Gaston Ingleside, who had been induced to go, much, he said, against his will and, he feared, in his country's time, he being a Whitehall magnate; but he thought it only right, as a good parent, to participate in some of Ann's actions.

"But what I am chiefly doing," he said, "is marvelling at the change that has come over life in my time. I can no more fancy my father taking me to the Derby than to an opium den; yet here am I placidly seated in the same dissolute vehicle as my unmarried daughter, on our way to the great reprehensible annual carnival of vice."

"Yes," said Ann, "and you one of the newest K.C.B.s too, fresh from the King's presence."

"By the way," said Dollie, "the King will be there to-day. He always goes to the Derby. Perhaps you'll meet, sir. You know each other now, don't you?"

"I shall never forget him as long as I live," said Sir Gaston; "but even if he, as is likely, has forgotten my face, the spectacle of my legs, in hired knee-breeches, walking perilously backwards with a sword between them, must be indelibly printed on his memory."

"Do tell me," said Naomi. "Was it very dreadful?"

"Very," said Sir Gaston. "We did our best to hearten each other, but the dentist is nothing to it. Decent fellows we were, most of us: brewers, music hall managers, actors, Party-plutocrats, caterers, and so forth, all armed to the teeth, all conscious of clothes we had never worn before and should probably never wear again — which is in itself an embarrassment — and all on the brink of changing our identity for ever."

"How do you mean?" Naomi asked.

"Why, all my life until then, or a few days before (but unofficially, of course, since the accolade had not been bestowed), I have been to the world Mr. Ingleside. My Christian name, which always seemed to me a strangely affected one and was due to my mother as a young woman having deplorable romantic tendencies, I have done my best to suppress. And now the Ingleside alone goes for ever, and everyone is entitled to call me Sir Gaston."

"I almost wonder you accepted the title," Naomi said.

"My dear Mrs. Falconer," said Sir Gaston, "I wonder, too, now; but at the time there seemed to be

several rather good reasons. Perhaps the best of all was that I was a widower."

Sir Gaston gave me a sidelong glance here which I greatly esteemed. Here was good company; old in bottle. The joke was lost, I fear, on Naomi, who puckered her beautiful forehead over it in vain. As for the rest, they had not been listening to us at all but were busy watching the occupants of the other carriages, with some of whom Dollie and Farrar were on very familiar terms.

We reached the course at last and the Grand Stand, where Farrar, who seems to be a millionaire, had a box for the week, in which not only were chairs but a very attractive lunch.

I thanked him later in the day for being so hospitable to strangers.

"That's all right," he said, almost as if I had apologized for something.

A curious young man, one of those mixtures of sagacity and apathy, thoughtfulness and blankness, which the idle classes throw up so easily and which make an expensive education look so foolish. His passion is motoring, but he has leanings towards the air, which, however, his wife discourages. He therefore does not fly himself, although he has been up as a passenger once or twice, but spends most of his time between Brooklands and Hendon, being convivial with his aviating friends while they are alive, and following them loyally to the grave when they fall.

"What is it like in the air?" I once asked him.

"Ripping," he said.

"But the sensations?" I continued. "How do you feel?"

"Ripping," he said.

"And what does the world look like down below as you rush along?"

"Ripping," he said.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH I AM INITIATED INTO THE MYSTERIES OF THE RING, AND AM MORE BEWILDERED THAN USUAL BY MY COUNTRYMEN'S AVOIDANCE OF FACTS

THE scene from our box was remarkable. Beneath was stretched an undulating mass of people such as it is usual to call, in descriptive articles, a sea of humanity, and in the present instance the simile has peculiar propriety, for from it rose a persistent, murmuring roar very like the waves in certain moods. This sound proceeded chiefly from the breakers — or bookmakers — immediately beneath us, in the privileged enclosure where gambling is a duty. Then came the course, and then a square mile of rabble, black in the main, like all crowds, but chequered with brighter colours, and broken by booths and roundabouts and all the fun of the fair.

We began our lunch at once and ate through the first race, on which Dollie was not betting. Then Dollie invited me down among the bookies, and the men of us went, except Ingleside.

"No," he said, "so many of the staid young gentlemen in my department are absent to-day owing to

domestic troubles, that I am nervous. It would hurt me too much to run into any of them. It is too crowded, too," he added. "The fact is, I am an anti-social animal and it's no use disguising the fact. I like a few persons very much; but all the rest affright me. Write me as one who loves his fellow-men but is very easily bored by them."

So we fought our way into the enclosure in the very centre of the competitive clamour. Never have I heard such a noise; never seen human faces so distorted by vociferousness. It was a remarkable scene. Everyone there was doing a thing which it is generally agreed by statesmen and sociologists is bad, and which, if it is done outside the course, is illegal. Some of the leading men in the land were here, and the Monarch and Defender of the Faith was in a box just above. Enough money to endow all the hospitals of the country was changing hands lightly over the issue of a contest between a dozen horses; and not one penny of it was going to the country, except indirectly, later on, in the form of death duties or income tax. For we do not make racing men or bookmakers pay a farthing towards the exchequer for their amusement. Even France, which has never pretended that betting was wrong and holds its most popular race-meetings on Sunday, makes the betting class pay two and a half per cent. of its winnings to the hospitals of the land; but in England we allow this great source of revenue to go untouched.

I afterwards asked Sir Gaston how this was.

"Simple enough," he said. "If you tax betting you legalize it; and then you have all Nonconformity in arms against you."

"But we let it go on," I said.

"Yes," he replied, "but that's England. We have a profound aptitude as a nation for closing one eye."

"The odd thing about England in that respect," I said, "is that, individually, all the Englishmen that one meets agree that we are absurdly illogical if not hypocritical; yet in the mass these hypocrisies are encouraged. How is that? In France the units are representative of the national feeling; in England the units are not representative."

"I don't know," said Sir Gaston. "The same problem has perplexed me. I'm not proud of the anomaly."

"Are they all Jews?" I asked Dollie, in the ring.

"Nearly all, and the owners, too," said Dollie; "but that's all right. What's the matter with Jews? They're good enough Christians, most of them. Here's a tip-topper anyway," and he stopped to speak to an eager anxious man in a white hat who, if he was not a Jew, had been vaccinated with Hebrew lymph.

I was introduced to the tip-top Christian and he wished me a lucky day.

"No money about," he said, "compared with what it used to be."

"Do you mean there's less betting?" I inquired.

"Oh no, much more," he said, "but it's chiefly S.P. now. They don't do it here as they used."

"Starting price, that means," Dollie explained. "The law allows starting-price betting anywhere, but betting of this kind only on race-courses. The difference is that in S.P. betting you don't know what the odds are until the race is finished, and in course betting you try to get the best odds you can. S.P. betting is chiefly done by telegram, and no money may change hands till after the race, otherwise it's illegal. They say the post office would smash if it weren't for betting."

"Oh, do stop," I said; "you are giving me far too much to think about."

Turning away from this predatory avaricious scene — for it is idle to call it anything else — I made my way to the distant paddock to see the innocent causes of all the trouble, the race-horses. It is one of the strangest mysteries in a world that specializes in such things, that this beautiful, loyal creature should leave behind it such a wake of seaminess and fraud.

After a few minutes in the paddock I returned to the ring where Dollie and Farrar were still busy trying to find longer odds on their fancies; but the horses coming out of the paddock on their way to the starting-point sent Dollie upstairs at the run to see what the girls wanted to back. "Girls," he added, "always choose horses by either the jockey's face or his colours — and I'm hanged if it isn't as good a way as following what we call form."

Dollie was an eternity on his mission, and I had a thousand elbows in my back in my efforts to remain

where he had placed me; and I heard, I suppose, a thousand tips as to the winner passing between friends. But one phrase alone impressed me, uttered by a jovial old man to a youthful companion who might have been his nephew, "Always back the favourite to win, my boy," he said, "and the most likely of the outsiders both ways."

Being always open to good counsel I determined to follow this advice; so when Dollie returned and asked me what I wished to back, I said I wanted four pounds on the favourite to win, and three pounds each way on Peppermint.

Dollie opened his eyes. "You seem to know your own mind all right," he said.

"I always determined to follow this rule," I said, "if ever I should take to betting — to back the favourite to win and a likely outsider both ways."

Dollie whistled. "Are you taking me to the Derby or am I taking you?" he asked. "Very well, come and put it on. Naomi is on to Peppermint too; she says the jock's such a little angel. (She ought to hear him in the paddock!) Mrs. Farrar wants old rose and purple — he's on a hopeless ruin named Usquebaugh. See what you can get," Dollie added.

I approached the reputed Christian, who was besieged by clients, and at last secured his ear.

"I want to put four pounds on Paladin," I said.

"Seven pounds to four, Mr. Heathcote's friend," he directed his clerk instantly, without even looking at me, but holding out his hand for the money.

"And three pounds each way Peppermint," I said.

"Twenty-four pounds to three and six pounds to three Peppermint, Mr. Heathcote's friend," he continued, and was taking Dollie's various commissions before I could move.

"That's the way," said Dollie, as we struggled back up the stairs. "Those are the heads! If we only had Cabinet Ministers like that!"

We were in time to see the start through our glasses a mile away over the crowds and the booths. A roar indicated that the horses were off and at once the hubbub below quieted, only to break out afresh into new offers as the horses began to assert themselves.

One race, knowing men often say, is as good as another; only one horse can win anyway, and as desperate efforts to be that horse are made at Lingfield as at Newmarket, Ascot or Epsom. This may be true, on paper, but, as a matter of emotional fact, there is no race like the Derby, because there is no race with so much human interest behind it. These thousands of people cannot be disregarded; each brings something of intensity. And then the stage management of the Derby is so much more elaborate than that of any other race; the steady growth of interest in the horses, the daily bulletins in the press, the sweepstakes, and so forth. And the race itself — all horses starting at the same weight and the same age. No, there may by chance be finer riding in certain races of the year, and closer finishes, but the

Derby horses start in an air more heavily charged with human electricity than any other, and, I imagine, always will. For heroic endurance on a great scale, the Grand National; but for the maximum of excitement, the Derby.

An outsider won, and the favourite was not even placed; and immediately we knew the result we all knew why we should have backed it if only we had thought a little longer. But at the Derby thought is not easy; there is so much distraction, and the conditions of life are so upset, that one's ordinary mental processes refuse to work. The winner was a grey filly, and there was every reason why I, for one, should have known it would win, because the only horse that I had specially noticed on the way down was a grey filly rolling in a field. Surely there was the finger of Providence in that! On my mentioning this, Dollie asked with much asperity why I had not told him?

"It meant nothing to me," I said, "partly because I am not a gambler, and not a little because I had no notion that any of the Derby runners were grey or fillies. Had I stayed at home and read the paper I might have known; absurd to bring me to the course and then expect me to know anything of the horses. There was no grey filly in the paddock."

"No," said Dollie, "I'm afraid you're right. No one ever yet saw a real horse in the paddock — at least, not until the race was over."

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH FOUR-LEGS MAKE MUCH ANXIETY FOR TWO-LEGS AND SIR GASTON DEVELOPS OCCULT GIFTS

"WELL," said Dollie, later in the afternoon, "how do we stand? I personally am forty pounds down. Farrar here is fifteen pounds down. Falconer, having neglected my advice, is several pounds to the good. Mrs. Falconer and Mrs. Farrar, having had the good sense to ignore form and the prophets, and to bet entirely on combinations of colour, have made a little, and Ann saved her face. But if we are going to make anything we must do it now. You study the card while Farrar and I go and do some intelligent eavesdropping."

On their returning they brought news of a likely outsider named Crumpet, ridden by one of the most successful jockeys of the day.

"I've put my shirt on him," said Dollie, "both ways. If he wins I make a lot; if he's only placed I get back my dropped forty."

"And if he loses?" I said.

"We will draw a veil," Dollie replied. "But my favourite poison is prussic and apollinaris."

"Here you are," said Ann Ingleside quietly. "Please put this half-sovereign for me on Witch Hazel to win."

"Why Witch Hazel?" Dollie asked.

"I fancy him," she said.

"Any other orders?" Dollie asked.

"Yes," I said, "here is a five pound note and a sovereign. Heaven knows I need both, but if they go it will make a picturesque topic on which to converse at dinners and such places, and if I win, I dare say I shall find something to do with it. I want you to put four pounds on Ratton's mount for a place, and two pounds to win."

"Why Ratton's?" Dollie asked. Our independence was beginning to tell on him.

"Because Ratton hasn't had a win to-day, and he is in the habit of doing better than that. He will ride like a demon this time because it's the last chance."

"Very well," said Dollie. "But why I've been wasting my breath instructing you about racing, I shall never understand."

Naomi produced ten shillings and asked for it to be put on my horse, five shillings each way.

Downstairs ran Dollie, and we watched him moving from one group to another seeking the largest price — or at least we thought we did, for, from a box at Epsom, every young man in the ring looks alike.

It was a race that I shall never forget. The other races Dollie had watched stolidly enough; but here,

with so much at stake, he gave in and disappeared from the room. Men seem to be affected very differently. Some hate to see the horses at all, after the start, and at the close come out of retirement to know the result; others watch every step through their glasses, and either learn their fate early or do not know it till the post; some are silent; others shout instructions to the horses and their riders, quite oblivious to the fact that they are a mile away doing their best.

The field in this race kept very closely together and the horses passed us in a mass of brown and silk from which our eyes could distinguish nothing definite. So we had to wait for the numbers, which went up like this

9
3
7

9 was Palimpsest, ridden by Ratton; 3 was Witch Hazel, and 7 was Crumpet. Dollie came in at this moment and glanced at the board.

"Good Heavens," he said, "I've just scraped in, but Falconer's on to the winner. And 3 — who's 3?"

"Witch Hazel," said Ann.

"Perhaps you'll tell me," said Dollie, "why you fixed on such an outsider as that?"

"Because," said his betrothed, "Mrs. Boody, our housekeeper, always says that if you're ever in doubt what to do you should try Witch Hazel. I mean when you've hurt yourself."

"Why didn't you tell me that?" Dollie asked with some spirit.

"Because tips of that kind are such personal things. They don't work for others. Anyway, you're all square."

"Yes, but I could only get 3 to 1 for a place on Crumpet, while I got you 4½ to 1. But if I don't hurry we shan't get even what we have won."

Dollie returned laden with gold and five pound notes, which he distributed. To Ann he gave two pounds, fifteen shillings which she took with a little pout, remarking, "If only I'd put it on to win!" while Naomi, when he gave her her ill-gotten gains, remarked, "If only I'd made it a sovereign!"

"Ah," said Sir Gaston, "what you ought to say is, 'If only I hadn't bet at all.' There's an insidious poison in that money. Mark my words. Some day if you go on like this you'll be on the staff of the *Star* or become a secret cocoa-drinker. If you go to my overcoat, Ann," he continued, "and feel in the right-hand pocket, you'll find the card I marked before this race."

Ann fetched it and gave it to her father.

"I don't insist on your believing me," he said, "but it is true none the less. While you were making up your minds how to lay out your money, I tried my luck at spotting the winner, and here's the result."

He held out the card and, to our astonishment and almost to Dollie's permanent and tragic undoing, we

saw that he had named not only the winner but the second horse as well.

"My hat, sir," cried Dollie, "how did you do that?"

Sir Gaston looked inscrutable.

"No, but do tell us," Naomi said. "It's like magic."

"Well," said Sir Gaston, "I'll tell you. But you'll keep the secret, I hope. I first placed the race-card on the table — you could have seen me if you hadn't all been so consumed by the lust for money. I then took my pencil in my right hand, held the card with my left, closed my eyes, and made a dot at random. That was the first horse. Then I made dots for the other two, and you behold the result — two right out of three."

"But why didn't you back your fancy?" Dollie asked. "You've thrown away a fortune."

"For two reasons," said Sir Gaston. "One is that I never bet and don't want to. And the other is that I had no confidence in my prescience."

"Will you try the same thing for me for the Oaks on Friday?" Dollie asked.

"Certainly — if you will promise me something."

"Well?"

"Not to bet on the result."

"Oh, but that's what I want it for."

"Yes, but such lucky shots don't come off twice in one week."

The Farrars came back at this moment in very low spirits, for they had had bad luck all day.

"Well," I said, "I'm rolling, anyway. And you're all going to dine with me to-night and the balance shall go to the hospitals — as though I had won it in France."

"But why don't you follow your luck and put in on a horse?" Dollie gasped.

"Not for another year," I said. "I bet only at the Derby. I couldn't stand the wear and tear of it oftener. It's too exciting. My heart is beating at this moment like a propeller. I want a quiet life. Besides, think of Naomi—you know the miseries in store for a gambler's wife. And another thing—I have it very clearly fixed at the back of my head—and nothing that I have seen to-day alters the feeling—that there is nothing to pluck on a race-course but Dead Sea fruit."

"We will now sing hymn one hundred and forty-two," said Dollie, with great solemnity; "Wow-wow!"

I approached Farrar with an expression of sympathy for his losses.

"Oh, that's nothing," he replied. "I'm still on the right side for the year and I'll pull this round safe enough. Things look blackest before the dawn, don't you know."

"If you take to proverbs," said Sir Gaston, who was standing by, "you'll never know where you are, for there's a neutralizer for every one of them."

"I can give Farrar an example," I said, "that will

take some neutralizing—'The grey mare's the better horse.'"

Farrar groaned, but his wife laughed.

"Thank you, Mr. Falconer," she said; "what a pretty compliment!"

Which only shows how we stumble on some of our neatest things.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH AN OLD GAMBLER (RETIRED FROM BUSINESS) TELLS OF A TRIUMPH, AND THE YOUNGER GENERATION IN LOVE COME UNDER REVIEW

ON the way back Sir Gaston told us of an incident many years ago, when he did occasionally put something on a horse — not as a habit, but if he heard anything.

He had been staying, he said, with two friends for a fortnight in Ireland, fishing at a man named Regan's. One friend was Glenister, a curious obstinate fellow, now in India; the other was Horace Bradley, the K.C. The day before their last they were driving over to Rushtown to see the races, and on the way Captain O'Driscoll overtook them in his American buggy. I reconstruct Sir Gaston's story.

"'Going to the races?' O'Driscoll asked, as he slowed down for a moment. 'So'm I. See you there.' He clicked on, and then, stopping again, turned round to call out — 'Don't forget Blackadder for the College Stakes. Dead cert. Put your shirts on,' and was again off.

"'All very well,' said Glenister thoughtfully, 'but where are our shirts? Speaking personally, my shirt is a return ticket to London and about eighteen shillings, which I shall need.'

"'Yes,' said Bradley. 'And I'm no better off, confound it!'

"'You forget,' said I, 'that I have a five-pound note in my pocket intended as our joint tip to old Rice.' (Rice was Regan's butler.) 'Lucky we decided to put it aside.'

"'Yes,' said Glenister, 'but that's the butler's.'

"'Not till to-morrow,' said I.

"'No,' said Bradley, 'not till to-morrow.'

"'But hang it all,' said Glenister, who was a precisian and adored his conscience, 'where are we if we put it on this horse and the beggar loses? I know these dead certs. It won't be Rice's to-morrow, then, will it? To my mind it's his now, and we ought to respect his ownership. It was to make sure of his having it that we gave it to the Goat to keep.'

"I was the Goat. How funny to think of it now! I haven't been called the Goat for hundreds of years."

"O father," said Ann, "may I call you the Goat?"

"Certainly not," said the Knight. "I admitted that Glenister was logical," he continued, "'but all the same,' I said, 'here's a straight tip, and it's a sin not to use it. One doesn't often get them, and to start a whole menagerie of sophistries in return is the kind of ingratitude that providence doesn't soon forgive.'

"'Of course,' said Bradley. 'The Goat's right. And, after all, there's no sense in being so infernally conscientious. A gamble's a gamble, and old Rice would be almost as pleased to hear that we had put his fiver on a horse as to have it shoved into his hand.'

"Glenister laughed. 'I say no more,' he said. 'You do what you like with the fiver. Personally, I shall have ten shillings on Blackadder to win, although why on earth we all swallow that soldier man's advice so unquestioningly I shall never understand.'

"'If the Goat will lend me two pounds,' said Bradley, 'I will back Blackadder for a pound each way.'

"'The Goat won't,' said I. 'All that the Goat proposes to do is to put the butler's fiver on to win.'

"This, later, I did, having found a bookmaker who was giving 10 to 1; and, true to Captain O'Driscoll's word, Blackadder romped in an easy winner.

"I collected the eleven rustling five-pound notes and stowed them carefully away inside my coat, and in the late afternoon we drove back. Naturally we had a good deal to say about the racing, our fortunate meeting with O'Driscoll, and so forth. And then suddenly Glenister remarked, 'I wonder what the old boy will do with it? Set up as a small tobacconist in Dublin, do you think?'

"'What old boy?' I asked.

"'Why, Rice, of course.'

"'You can't set up as a small tobacconist on five pounds,' said Bradley. 'At least, if you did, you'd be so small a tobacconist that your customers would want a microscope.'

"'Don't be an idiot,' said Glenister. 'He'll have fifty-five pounds, won't he?'

"Bradley and I were silent. This was a proposition that needed thought.

"'I don't see why he should have more than the fiver,' I said at last. 'It was all we were going to give him, wasn't it? You will admit that?'

"'Certainly,' said Glenister. 'It was his fiver, and you were keeping it for him, weren't you? You won't deny that?'

"'In a way I was,' I said.

"'O law!' groaned Bradley. 'What a hair-splitter!'

"'Very well, then,' said Glenister. 'You had Rice's five pounds and you gambled with it — in itself a jolly unprincipled thing to do, as it wasn't yours: poor devils are doing time all over the place for much less; and now, when your flutter turns up trumps, you deny him — who might have been your victim — the benefit! I call it downright mean — squalid, in fact.'

"'You make it sound rotten,' I said, 'but there's a fallacy somewhere. To begin with, as I said before, it isn't the butler's own money till to-morrow. He hadn't earned it till the end of our visit. If it wasn't his it is ours, and we could do as we liked with it.

We did, and the result is we have now enough to divide up into sixteen pounds, thirteen shillings, and fourpence each, which I shall be pleased to give you directly we get back, while Rice has his fiver intact.'

"'Not for me,' said Glenister. 'I won five pounds with my own ten bob, and that's all I make out of Blackadder. I can't take your sixteen pounds odd, because it isn't mine. I may snore, as you agree to allege, but I'm not a thief.'

"'O law!' Bradley groaned again. 'My dear Glenister, you're talking like a Herbert Spencer sort of ass. All it means is that the Goat and I will have to take twenty-five pounds each?'

"'No,' said Glenister, 'you can't do that; because a third, at any rate, of the original fiver was mine, or, as I hold, the butler's, and he must have what that share made. You and the Goat can take the sixteen pounds odd each, but the butler must have my third and the original fiver besides. But I don't envy you your explanation to him.'

"'No,' I said after a while, 'either the butler must have all or none. I can see that.'

"'Dash the whole stupid business!' exclaimed Bradley. 'Let him have it all. We'll be generous.'

"'It belongs to him,' said Glenister. 'There's no generosity in the matter. There's nothing but justice or injustice.'

"'Very well,' Bradley snapped out. 'I'm tired of it. Next time I go to a race-meeting I'll take care it's not with a blooming Socrates.'

"'Then that's settled,' I said as cheerfully as I could. 'Rice has the lot.'

"'The lot,' said Glenister. 'I'll admit it's enough, but there's no other course.'

"We rode the rest of the way in disgust and silence, and then" — here Sir Gaston began to laugh — "and then the rummest thing happened. Regan's groom met us at the stable-yard and took the mare's head. He seemed to be unusually excited, and I wondered if he had learned that he too had backed a winner.

"'I'm afraid you'll find the house a bit upset,' he said to Glenister, 'but the fact is, there's been a little trouble while you were away. The butler's bolted. It seems he's been dishonest for a long time, and to-day he thought the game was up and ran.'

"We looked at each other and then a threefold sigh rent the air.

"Bradley suddenly began to roll with laughter.

"Glenister for a while did not speak. Then, 'I'll trouble you,' he said to me, 'for sixteen pounds, thirteen shillings, and fourpence, and the third of a five-pound note.'"

I wondered what were Sir Gaston's feelings as to his prospective son-in-law's gambling propensities, and later, on the way back, he enlightened me.

"It's an odd business, this," he said, "to you and me, for I take it that you, like myself, were brought up in a middle-class way by quiet and God-fearing parents. Here we are with a lot of young people doing a thing which my father would have heartily

disapproved of, and which we should have the greatest difficulty in defending if we were accused of it in public by a professional religious man or enthusiastic philanthropist. You, of course, would have a comparatively easy time. You would come out merely as a retired gentleman from abroad who was interested in social customs. But I — I am a Government servant and the father of a young girl who is going to marry this racing habitué. What sort of a case should I have?"

"Well, if it comes to that," I said, "what sort of case does one ever have while the prosecution is talking? Personally, I always agree with my own censors, although dimly I am conscious that there is another side to the case — mine — if only it could be made articulate. All the same, I too have been considering the question of young Heathcote. When are they going to marry?"

"I haven't a notion," said Sir Gaston. "All I know is that it will be later rather than sooner. My daughter is out for what she calls a good time — by which, of course, she means an irresponsible one. She has enough instinct and good feeling to realize that once she is married irresponsibility will cease. She has not enough emotional dependence to be impatient for marriage. Heathcote seems to me precisely similar in temperament. Hence I look upon them as two of the most enviable creatures living. I sit and watch them at their superficial jokes and superficial wranglings, and most of all at their frivolous

plan-makings for the morrow, and consider them the heirs of the ages in the happiest sense. The best of it is that both are really exceedingly sensible, and it only needs a shock — such as standing at the altar steps in their best clothes, with a really serious person in a surplice saying really serious things — to steady them for life. Ann, who has already shown her capacity for work and routine, having learned typing thoroughly in an office, will instantly become a wife and Heathcote instantly a husband. He will adopt regular habits, come home to lunch, and very likely keep accounts. The very harmless form of wild oats that they are sowing now I don't fear in the least. I should be much more alarmed if they were always embracing and whenever they walked out he took her arm and they were both hastening the wedding: then I should fear that the flame might die down too quickly, and trouble follow. But these two — they're all right. They have a public contempt for each other which contains the best promise."

I dare say Sir Gaston is right. He seems to be shrewd. But his remarks caused me to press Naomi's hand under the rug with more than usual fondness.

Yet Ann was not really selfish, even if she shared with her father a perversity which made her willing to appear so; for when once we found ourselves in a block, and were conscious of the crying of a small child, with its mother, father, and two other children in a donkey barrow, it was Ann who saved the situation. Never have I heard such pitiful wailing.

The mother was tired and cross, and in no mood to be patient with it; the father was cross too, and the other children began to whimper in sympathy. Before anyone knew what she was about, Ann had jumped out of the car, taken the child from its mother, and was giving it one of Dollie's expensive chocolate creams and saying pretty crooning things to it. The mother and other children had the rest of the box, and in a short time all were happy again.

"But although it amuses me to watch them," Sir Gaston continued, "I can't find much real satisfaction in it. My other daughter, Alison, is completely lost to me, except for letters, for her husband has taken her to Ceylon. And now Ann is going; and deprived of any society of the younger generation, which, however it may irritate us at times, helps us to keep young and in touch with the day (I can say 'topping' with the best of them, although 'wow-wow' is beyond me), I have no alternative but to become old. And old age has no kind of attractiveness. I have no patience with people who profess to enjoy growing old. They merely remind one of those lines of the American poet:

Unto each man comes a day when his favorite sins all forsake him,
And he complacently thinks he has forsaken his sins.

Speaking for myself, who am nearing sixty, I would say that the only piece of satisfaction that the process

of ageing has brought to me is the knowledge that the word 'unshrinkable' has no real basis in fact. But I do not call myself really old yet. Not till a young woman offers me her seat in a railway compartment will that tragedy really be mine. At that moment I shall know that all is up."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH SUSSEX VOICES ARE RAISED IN MELODY, UNCLE JONAH GIVES HIS MEMORY PLAY, AND WE MEET A NAPOLEONIC QUAKER

WE have just been down into Sussex to get some songs of which word had reached the Director, whose passion is the search for these ancient melodies. Where others hunt hares or foxes, he pursues the elusive ditty. Village after village he draws blank, without ever losing heart, and then is rewarded by hearing at last of some old gaffer to be met with at the Red Lion or Blue Boar or King's Head, no matter how far away, who once sang a rare good song and can still quaver out the ghost of it. Then the Director rises to his greatest heights, for although deep potations and himself are at enmity, yet in the interests of England and music he has had (to allay suspicion) to consume much ale and stand ever so much more before the melodist was ready to begin.

Of course, not all his singers are in inns; he has found many in cottages, too; but the village public-house naturally remains the happiest hunting-ground.

On this occasion we were bound for a private house to which the singer had been bidden. The party consisted of the Director of course with his little musical notebook, Naomi, and I. My duty was to take down the words, a far more difficult task, as I have pointed out again and again, than to get the music, because all the words are different, whereas, the tune is the same all through. An added difficulty for the word-transcriber is the fact that old Sussex labourers have few or no teeth, and Heaven alone knows what sometimes they sing: certainly they themselves do not.

We were driven from the station in the dark to a rambling house under the hills, and having dined were led to another room in which three elderly brothers were seated and one brother's wife. Two were shepherds, one of whom — Uncle Jonah — still retained the round, or smock, frock. This one, I am pleased to record, could not read, nor could his younger brother, the married one, but the elder brother and the younger brother's wife were "scholards." The elder brother was the chief singer, and while the others played a little at backwardness, he was always ready with whatever song he could remember: a tall man about sixty-seven, with a ruddy, rather mischievous face fringed with whiskers, and a gentle sly humour. He and the shepherd were the pick; the younger brother was slower and more stolid.

It was a successful evening in that it yielded six or seven songs that the Director had not heard

before, although the quality, he said, was not equal to that of the West Country. Why, when we all equally have the gift of speech, there is this capriciousness in the bestowal of the gift of song, is a problem and anomaly that have always perplexed and irritated me. Why should one human throat be melodious, and another — my own, for example — emit nothing but dissonance? Again, why should one human creature with a voice be willing to use it, and another hide the gift under a bushel of self-consciousness? But the Director has a way with the shy that sooner or later prevails. He too begins to sing, and by-and-bye the shy enter in, and then gradually the Director drops out and the shy sing on alone and never falter again.

If the Director's methods were bewildering to me, what must they have been to these simple folk? For he takes out pencil and his little notebook ruled with staves, and the instant the singer has done he can go to the piano and play the song word for word, with all its peculiarities of movement, its hurryings and pauses, its unexpected cadences, its curious melancholy. Magic, surely! I can just begin to understand shorthand, but not this mystery. During the first verse he sits intent, with his pencil poised over the paper, waiting to strike. During the second verse he is recording all the time. During the third he makes little refining touches, and the tune is complete.

The words, taken separately, were my depart-

ment. The words of folk-songs without music are always far enough removed from melody, but the ditty which I copy here, which we may call "Winter's Signs," is, I think, the farthest removed of all, although as a piece of bleak impressionism it is good: indeed, rather like an etching; and yet, as sung by this old man, with his soft musical quavers, it was not only beautiful but hauntingly so. The words are exactly as he had them, all unconscious that they made contradictions and have neither scansion nor rhyme. Here they are:

The trees they're all bare, not one leaf to be seen,
  The meadows their beauty's all gone.
And as for the leaves, they're falling from the trees
  And the streams they were — and the streams they were — fast
    bound by the frost.

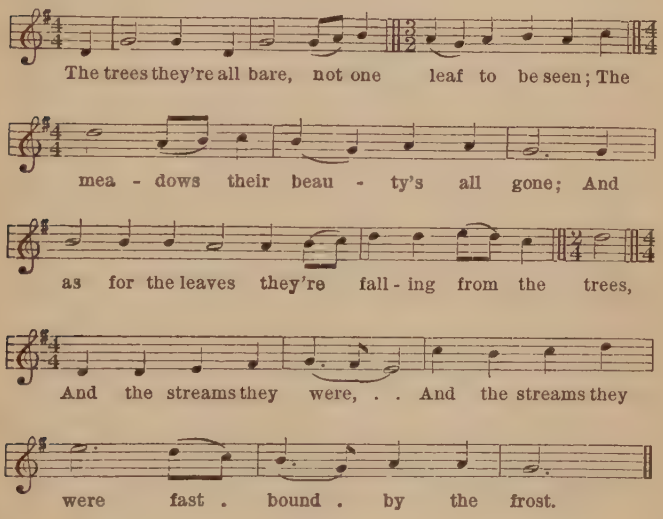
In the yards where the oxen all foddered with straw
  Send forth their breath like a stream,
The sweet-looking milkmaid she finds she must go;
  Flakes of ice finds she — flakes of ice finds she — on her
    cream.

The poor little small birds to the barn doors fly for food,
  Silent they rest on the spray,
The poor innocent sheep from the Downs until the fold
  With their fleeces all — with their fleeces all — covered with
    snow.

The poor little pigeon all shivering with cold,
  So loud the north winds do blow;
The poor tiny hares search the woods all for their food
  Unless their footsteps their — unless their footsteps their —
    innocence betray.

Now Christmas is gone my song is almost sung,
  Soon will come the springtime of the year,
Come unto me the glass and let your health go round
  And we wish you a — and we wish you a — happy New Year.

That, as I have said, is poor stuff, although it successfully carries its wintry feeling; but now try it with the music.

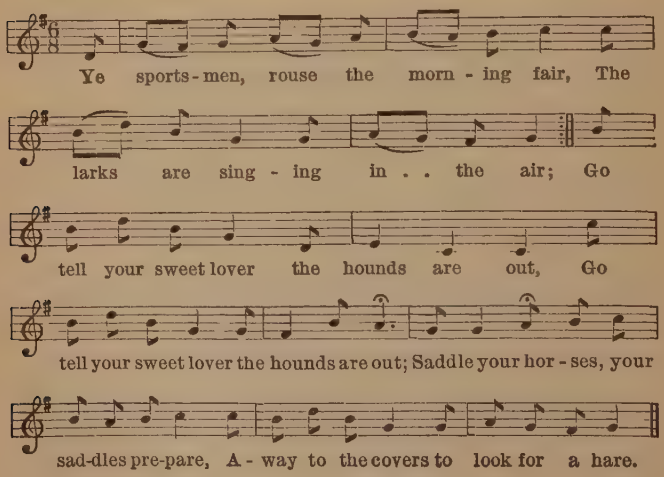


I assure you that the old man's gentle caressing voice when singing about the poor little pigeon, the poor innocent sheep, and the poor tiny hares, made the situation absolutely poignant.

One other of the songs I am tempted to reproduce: this also with an innocent hare in it; a hunting song. There is something rather pretty about the

willingness of the poor to sing hunting-songs — to praise a sport which exists wholly for their masters and in which they cannot participate. At the most they see the horsemen and hounds go by and hear the horn and the shouts; even the hare falls to the pack. But the English peasant is not envious. He accepts his lot quite simply and naturally, and after a long day's work in the fields and the rain, for insufficient shillings to add meat to the family table, is quite cheerfully ready to lift up his voice in praise of the sport which his roystering master has been enjoying. So let it be: I am merely recording the fact.

Here is the merriest and most tuneful of the hunting-songs.



We searched the fields that grows around,
Our trail is lost, our game is found,
Then out she springs, through brake she flies,
Then out she springs, through brake she flies.
Follow, follow the musical horn,
Sing follow, hark follow, the innocent hare.

Our horses go galloping over the ground,
Go breathing all after the torturing hound.
Such a game she has led us four hours or more,
Such a game she has led us four hours or more,
Follow, follow the musical horn,
Sing follow, hark follow, the innocent hare.

Our huntsman blows the joyful sound,
See how he scours over the ground.
Our hare's a sinking, see how she creeps,
Our hare's a sinking, see how she creeps,
Follow, follow, the musical horn,
Sing follow, hark follow, the innocent hare.

All on the green turf she pants for breath,
Our huntsman shouts out for death.
Hullo, hullo, we've tired our hare,
Hullo, hullo, we've tired our hare.
Wine and beer we'll drink without fear,
We'll drink success to the innocent hare.

The last line has an irony which no one seemed to see.

I must confess that a whole evening of song is to me full measure, and I took all the opportunities I could of getting Uncle Jonah, the voiceless shepherd in the smock, to talk of old times; but always with the fear of the Director very lively in me. For anecdot-

age is nothing to him. His purpose in life is to fill blank bars with little magical dots; for this and this only does he scour the coloured counties. All conversation is therefore an interruption, if not a misdemeanour. But when the singers, having sung all that the Director did not know, began to respond with songs that he did, I openly drew Uncle Jonah aside and filled again his glass and made certain masonic signs to indicate that though no doubt the Director was a worthy and even gifted man, here was one who sympathized with those who had no music in them, but preferred character and comedy in the blessed spoken word.

Old shepherds are peculiarly the treasuries of reminiscences of eccentric and historic figures of the country-side: such as Charley Dean, over at Coombe Place, who would ride his horse down the steepest slopes of the hills when hunting, so that you could see slide-marks several yards long afterwards — a "terrible daring rider he was"; and old David Wade, over at Madingdean, who did his own farriery work and mended his grey mare's broken leg so out an' out cleverly that he won a Point to Point steeplechase on her the next year; and Tom Woolley, over at West Green, whose lifelong feud with the Gipos (or gipsies), who stole his chickens and cut his gorse for umbrella handles, drove him, with the assistance of strong drink, off his head, so that he attacked every stranger with his stick and had to be kept in one room, the barred window of which is still to be

seen, while Mrs. Woolley made the farm pay as it had never paid before.

But best I liked his tales of his first master — dead now these many years — over at Bollingdean. A good man, a just man, and kind to the poor, but terrible hard and cautious. A Quaker. Couldn't bear to be kept waiting. Everything must be right. He used to lend money to smaller men now and then — he was a big maltster himself, with a small farm just for his own amusement — and one market day one of these debtors — Mr. Raikes, the ironmonger — was to meet him at the Black Horse yard at three o'clock to pay him one hundred pounds and clear off his debt. That was a Wednesday. The trap was ready; the Master and his nephew came into the yard; the Master looked at his watch, and precisely at three whipped up and away. Uncle Jonah — then a small stable-boy — was sitting behind, and as the trap sped along the High Street towards home he noticed Mr. Raikes running after it. He ventured to tell his master, who at once stopped.

Mr. Raikes came panting up. "Here you are, Mr. Willing," he gasped, proffering a canvas bag. "I'm sorry I missed you, but I had a customer."

"What is it in the bag?" Mr. Willing asked.

"The money," said Mr. Raikes.

"The Master took out his watch and turned to his nephew. 'I had no appointment, had I,' he asked, 'to see anyone about money in the High Street at five minutes past three? No, Mr. Raikes, not here. I'll

see thee in thy shop next market day;' and off we went, leaving Mr. Raikes with his mouth open in the middle of the street.

"When we got home, the Master said to his nephew, 'Take thy pencil and work out the interest at five per cent. on one hundred pounds for one week and let me know what it is.' Well, he did it and it came to one and elevenpence, and blowed if the Master didn't make Raikes pay the one and elevenpence extra the next week and send it to the local hospital. That was what he was like.

"Another time," Uncle Jonah went on, talking in broad Sussex, which I make no effort to reproduce, "a poor tramping woman gave birth to a baby under a hedge on his land. She was found in the morning and the Master was told about it. He asked exactly where she was and then gave orders for her to be carried into the Eight Acre barn and the doctor sent for.

"'But the Low Bottom barn's a matter of a mile nearer,' said the man, 'and it's empty too.'

"'Do as I tell thee,' said the Master, 'and let me know directly she is comfortable there and thy mistress will send her some soup from the house and go and see her.'

"Well, we carried her there. It was too soft for a cart, so there was nothing for it but to place her on some straw on a hurdle and carry her every inch of the way. I helped, and my arms ache to this minute when I think of it. And the worst of it was

we had to go past the other barn, which was all warm and snug, only a few yards away. You may be sure that we talked about what the Master was up to. But we weren't clever enough to guess right, not we.

"Directly she was comfortable I was sent back to tell the Master, and he himself drove off to fetch the doctor; and by-and-bye they came back together and the doctor did what he could for her and went off home to fill up the birth certificate. It wasn't for some time afterwards," said Uncle Jonah, "that we learned why we had to carry her all that way. Can you guess why it was?" Uncle Jonah asked; but I had no notion.

"Why," he said, "the Master's farm was in two parishes — Arringly and Thangmer — but only a little tiny corner where the barn stood was in Thangmer. All the rest was in Arringly, and so he had her carried to the barn so that the child should be registered as born in Thangmer parish and not be on the Arringly rates. 'For,' as he said, 'we don't want more pauper children than we can help in Arringly.' That's the sort of man he was; looked ahead and took everything into account."

Uncle Jonah told also of his own experiences in driving large flocks of sheep or lambs to distant markets in the country when he was a lad; and how they had to work out the route beforehand with great care so as to have as few turnpike gates to pass through as possible.

I asked him how much they had to pay for lambs to go through.

"Fippence a score," he said.

We did not break up till after midnight. To me the evening harvest of song seemed to be rather notable; but the Director knew better. Sussex is not a distinguished singing country, he explained. Somerset is the happiest hunting-ground. There they sing sweetest and have the best songs. By the time a good song reaches Sussex it is debased. Sussex has no style. But Somerset is full of style. This, surely, is very odd, and the Director offers no theories to explain it. He would like to, but he cannot; he is not a sociologist, he says, or an ethnologist, or a psychologist; he is merely a collector and preserver of the best old English songs that he has the fortune to hear. Well, I would rather be that than an "ist" of any calibre. I consider him to have done and to be doing one of the finest things any Englishman has ever done: a piece of the most exquisite patriotism; and I am proud to be of assistance in the cause.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH INADVERTENTLY I BECOME A PUBLIC CHARACTER AND, ALSO INADVERTENTLY, GIVE AN OPPORTUNIST AN IDEA

MR. FURLEY overtaking me recently on my way into London asked if I should be in the neighbourhood of Parliament Square about a quarter to three.

"Be there if you can," he said.

As it happened I was lunching at Queen Anne's Gate, and so I did pass through the square at the time named, glanced at our legislators — or at men who wished to look like our legislators and be taken for them, and, as far as I was concerned, succeeded — entering the House, and so went on to Chelsea, whither I was bound, by the Embankment.

The next day Mr. Furley sent down a note to Naomi asking her to be sure to drop in at the Shakespeare Electric Theatre (shameless name!) in Tottenham Court Road, if she was in that neighbourhood. So we both dropped in, and there, suddenly, as a series of pictures representing the meeting of Parliament on the day of the great debate was thrown upon the screen, my blood turned cold, for among

the other passers-by I saw myself. No one who has ever seen himself walk is likely to get over the shock, especially in the slightly accelerated gait of the cinema. Swift's "forked radish" does not compare as a reminder of littleness and mortality, and I am now convinced that Parliament should be approached either in cabs or on roller skates.

One sometimes wonders if the New World was not invented to destroy the mental balance of the Old. There is something sinister in the thought that America was discovered in the year that Lorenzo de' Medici died. With Lorenzo's life the richest period of generous and stimulating intellectual activity that man has seen — that revival of art and learning which we call the Renaissance — may be said to have come to an end. At that moment Columbus ran his prow against the land which was to produce in its greatest profusion everything which Giotto and his followers would most cordially condemn. Sitting in this picture palace, where my own gauche contours had been so disconcertingly sprung upon me, and watching scenes comic and scenes dramatic, carefully built up false stories of wild life and so forth, all passing dazzlingly across the sheet to the accompaniment of a clockwork *obbligato* and a piano, and all due to that amazing Edisonian inventiveness, I realized for the first time what a menace to human endeavour it has the chance of becoming, and how opposed to the humanist spirit. How many picture palaces London boasts I have no notion, but let us

say at a hazard two hundred. Each is open from noon till eleven at night continuously, and each contains daily, let us say, six hundred persons. These figures are probably far too low, but they will serve. That makes twelve thousand persons for every day of the year (for they open on Sundays), in London alone, watching a mechanical device which illustrates the activities of others. Not an ounce of personality — just sheer hard mechanism, whose only purpose is to beguile, to prevent thought.

I have not said all this to Mr. Furley, but if I did he would agree with me; for, like all men who derive their livelihood from concerns that exist for the amusement of their fellows, he is a cynic.

The next time I met him after the Tottenham Court Road experience he had an amused expression. "How did you like it?" he inquired.

"It was horrible," I said. "But where was your photographer? I saw no one about."

He laughed. "Did you notice a small furniture van pulled up at the side of the road?" he asked. "If you had examined it closely you would have noticed a little hole at the back. The photographer was inside and the camera was at that hole."

We were walking through Regent's Park at the time of this conversation and suddenly I sneezed, and I can sneeze louder than most men. It was fortunate I did so, for it showed me Mr. Furley's brain in action. He stopped dead.

"By Jove," he said, "there's an idea!"

I asked him to explain.

"Why," he said, "for a film. A comic one. 'Mr. Splodgers catches cold,' or, if you like, 'The Fatal Sneeze.' You begin with Mr. Splodgers being caught in a shower and drenched; or falling into a river would perhaps be better. Anyhow, he gets wet through. Then you show him trying to prevent a cold. He tries everything, including the home Turkish bath, but in vain; the cold comes on. You see him in a sneezing-fit. The first sneeze brings down the chandelier, the second the bookcase, the third all the ornaments on the mantelpiece, the fourth the ceiling itself, and so on. It will be great. I'll arrange it right away. How would you like to be Mr. Splodgers?"

I declined.

"I must pay you for the idea, anyway," Mr. Furley continued. "What do you think would be fair? Five guineas?"

"No," I said; "the idea was yours. All that I did was to sneeze. I make you a present of it."

But you can't make a free gift to men like that. Although I was at home again in less than two hours I could not beat Mr. Furley's sense of reciprocity, and on my table was a package containing a hundred of the choicest cigars I ever owned.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH A NUMBER OF CRAFTSMEN DISCUSS THEIR PRACTICES, AND MR. LACEY DEFINES THE THINGS THAT MATTER

I TOOK Lacey to the novelists' evening at Dabney's. "We'll just sit in a corner," I said, "and listen through the smoke. Unless, of course, you want to join in: I am quite certain I shall not."

"I shall join in if anyone is talking rubbish, of course," said Lacey quite simply, "just to put him right."

How jolly to be as sure of oneself as that!

"Well," I said, "I shall be silent. In fact, I have to be; because when I argue I am always converted, and that is so humiliating; or, at any rate, I recognize the truth in the other side's position. That is one disability; and another is that I am never sure of my spoken words. Give me a pen and whatever I say I will stand by; but when I talk I get led away."

"We must each go our way," said Lacey, "but, personally, when I find a man talking nonsense I sling him up."

Dabney's room was in full buzz when we arrived. Among the big guns present were Devon, the urbane

reformer, with his warm heart, passionate sense of justice, his universal pity and fastidious taste; Speyde, the uncompromising analyst of the body and mind in revolt, and the friend of freedom; Leigh, the sentimental humorist or humorous sentimentalist of middle-class London; and Sankville, who writes provincial epics with a Dutch brush, but with the expansive view and detached tolerance of an arbiter throned on a star.

These were the best known; but there were others: younger men feeling their way towards fiction, some independent, some still wondering whom it would be wisest to imitate. Twenty years ago there was no doubt, since all the manuscript babies, when at last they were born, had a way of resembling Stevenson; but to-day there are new influences. Sankville, himself, for example, is one, and a powerful one. Everyone will soon be describing provincial birthplaces with minute fidelity — and nothing else! Speyde's manner and method it is less easy to catch: he is intensely individual; he has had no predecessors and will leave no school of writers. His influence is rather upon life than upon his own craft. Devon, again, is idiosyncratic. The appeal of his work is so largely dependent upon his point of view; and points of view are the only safe thing left: imitators have to be wary in stealing them. It is when manner and matter are both straightforward that the imitators have their most profitable time. Look, for example, at *The Prisoner of Zenda*, what a progeny has that romance!

Novel-writing has become a habit. Men used to

write novels to amuse their fellow-creatures — to take tired people to the islands of the blest, as one of our finest living hands has put it — but to-day novel-writing has become a habit, resorted to for many different reasons. Some men write novels because they have got into a mess with a woman and want to see how it looks on paper, or to explain their real motives, or to find a way out. Other novels are really intimate letters intended for one reader only. Others — and these are largely those written by women — create the kind of life which the writer would have lived had she ever had the chance: exercises in what may be called the Consolation School of Fiction. But the greatest number are written because someone else wrote better, and the imitative faculty is so strong in us.

Of course there is only one thing for a novelist to be, and that is himself. But one has to attain a certain age to know that. To try to write in anyone else's manner is fatal. To novelists who have not the courage or the conceit to be themselves, but who try to infuse a popular element into their work, I would give this advice, "Do what you can as well as you can, and let the others do what you can't, without envying them." And when they have succeeded I would go to them again and say, "Never have the faintest fear of a copyist."

Devon and Sankville not only were novelists but successful dramatists too; but Speyde had had no luck with the stage.

"How you can do it, I can't think," he said. "It's

a new language, a new world. Everything that one has learnt has to be forgotten. The things that should be whispered have to be shouted. At least, that is what the stage-managers and producers say, and since you are in their hands you have to believe it. But no more of it for me; I have done with limelight. Of course it's all right for Devon, because he's a homilist. Anyone with a lesson to teach can disregard conventions or accept them."

"That's all very well," said Devon, "but I must decline to be isolated as the one dramatist who has a moral to enforce. All the best dramatists have."

"Of course," said Sankville, "every Englishman is a Puritan at heart, in so far as he prefers that everyone else should be virtuous. Hence when he writes a play it naturally makes for virtue. The study of our neighbour's conduct is the national profession. It also forms the material of every play and every novel."

"And every newspaper," said Leigh.

"Of course — every newspaper, and every weekly review, doesn't it, Dabney?" Sankville replied.

"I suppose so," Dabney said; "but, at any rate, newspaper men don't pretend to do more than record results. They make no claim, as you novelists and dramatists do, to be able to read the heart and discern the springs of action and all the rest of it."

"Well, and can't we?" Sankville asked.

"Of course you can't," said Dabney. "It was at once one of the kindest and cruellest things

that Heaven ever did to deny to human beings all capacity for really knowing anything about other human beings. You fellows can deceive us by your art into the illusion that you know; but that's all. Nobody knows. There's only one way, I take it, to write a psychological novel, and that is to proceed from yourself outwards. Done with courage and fidelity, that might give us one character that approximated to life; but you fellows crowd a hundred characters into each book. Someone once said, as a joke, that the way to write a novel was to make all the characters behave exactly as the author would, because we're all exactly alike, except that you yourself are a shade more imaginative and sensitive than anybody else. That was intended ironically, but I don't see any fault in it as a piece of practical advice. It has been successfully enough followed. But the result is not good enough — except as saleable stuff calculated to provide you with a motor-car, or a rock-garden, or whatever else you want.

"It is because no one can really know others and can only guess at himself in imaginary situations," Dabney continued, "that I think all this recurring talk about absolute freedom for the novelist is such rot. Speyde here is always claiming for the novelist an unfettered hand. Everything, he says, must be told. We must have full-lengths; not mere heads or kit-cats any more. For too long had novelists suffered under the restrictions placed upon them by

Mrs. Grundy and the circulating libraries. No story of a man's or woman's life is worth telling unless it tells all; and so on. But, in my capacity as a provocative host, let me say I don't give a row of pins for it."

"Nor I," Lacey burst in. "If that's what the new novel is to be I shall return to my Dickens with the greater pleasure."

Speyde was indignant. "We are talking about novels," he said: "documents. Not panoramas. Dickens doesn't count here. Thackeray might have counted if he'd had a chance. You remember his complaint that since Fielding no one had been allowed to draw a whole man."

"Thackeray did very well without the dispensation," said Dabney. "As a matter of fact, I doubt if he could have gone further than he did; I doubt if anyone can go further than he does go: we all do our damnedest. I have always rather suspected that remark of Thackeray's: it was one of those hasty things which great men say and forget and some little twopenny-halfpenny listener remembers and sets down for ever. Given any imagination in the reader, he knows as much about Mr. Arthur Pendennis as there is any need for him to know, and surely you will admit that a novel is the work of the reader as well as the author."

"I quite agree," said Sankville. "A novelist's duty is to do his work within the limits imposed upon him. The English don't like certain things blurted out in

their stories. Very well, then, the English novelist had got to say these things between the lines. Thackeray, who was about equally interested in cause and effect, did it most admirably; Meredith, who was rather more interested in cause than effect, did it better; Dickens, who was interested only in effect, left it alone. Nowadays there is a kind of competition among novelists as to which shall be boldest."

"Yes," said Dabney, "but the bore of it is, to those of us who know anything of life, that their boldness is such childish business. There is only one thing that they want to say, and we know exactly what it is. When Speyde talks about full lengths that's all he means. Nothing else. You would all save lots of time — if you will allow a mere journalist and frivolous novel-reader to make a suggestion — if you put at the beginning of your books a warning to the effect that the hero, heroine, and villain who are to be met in the pages that follow are human beings with the ordinary emotions. That, after all, is the only thing you want us to understand."

"Reverting to that matter of saying the more critically emotional or physical thing between the lines," said the quiet voice of Devon, "it might be laid down as an axiom — might it not? — that the success of a novelist in thus conveying these impressions without printing them is largely the proof of his excellence? It seems to me that the photographic reproduction of life which Speyde asks for requires totally different gifts from those of the

novelist. Something of the statistician; much of the morbid anatomist."

"There's another thing," said Dabney, "that makes this realistic stuff a mistake, and that is that the English don't want the truth about anything. They never tell it and don't want it told to them. An appearance of truth — the ghost of truth — is all you need offer them."

But Speyde wouldn't have it. "No," he said. "English fiction has got to be freed, and the only way to do it is for the novelist to tell the whole truth, extenuating and suppressing nothing."

"Granting that for a moment," said Leigh, "it does not even then follow — with all the libraries clamouring for this kind of minute revelation — that the novel will come; because before there can be a novel there must be a novelist, and the novelist required here is one of stupendous genius."

"Quite right," said Dabney, "and you can bet that when the stupendous genius comes he will do exactly as he likes, just as, in fact, Shakespeare did, and Thackeray and Dickens and Meredith did. It is the little people who lay down and obey the rules; the big ones, who use the vintage inks, go their own gait. What England wants is not franker novels but a greater novelist. A measure of frankness is the heritage of us all, although we have a way of neglecting it, but greatness comes capriciously, and you may whistle for it in vain."

"Meanwhile," said Leigh, "let's go on writing just

as we always do; because, in default of greatness, that pays best. That is to say," he said, "I will go on with my London fairy tales; and Speyde will go on with his exposures of the folly of the marriage laws; and Devon will go on with his thoughtful gentlemen and ladies in perplexity; and Sankville will go on throwing details in the eyes of the public. Oh, you minutiæ men, I don't believe in you a bit," he continued; "you have us all the time. We don't know where we are. We look for an impulsive human action, and tumble over the coal-scuttle."

Sankville laughed. "You can't visualize people until you've got their surroundings," he said.

"And then there's not time," replied Leigh. "Life is short, you know. Art can be too long."

"And what do you think of all this talk?" Lacey asked me.

"It's interesting," I said, "but it's only talk."

"That's just it," he replied. "They're always at it. They go on as if novels mattered."

"What does matter?" I asked.

"There you have me," he said, "but not novels, anyway. Paying your way matters. Not letting people down matters. Keeping a hold on yourself matters. But books, bless your heart, books! Books don't help you to real life, except possibly as an anodyne to take away the thoughts from facts — from Carey Street and things like that."

"Quite right," said Dabney, who had joined us; "and I would like to make every public man publish

his truthful list of the things that matter. H. G. Wells, who one feels would seek the truth even in the cannon's mouth, once wrote a book called *First and Last Things*, a kind of spiritual stock-taking. That was some time ago, and his mind is so sensitive to progress and so receptive of ideas, drawing them from the air as Franklin's key drew electricity from the thunder-cloud, that he may by now have changed his opinions in many ways. None the less it was his creed at the time, expressed with all his mastery of unambiguous prose and his desire not to be misunderstood. It was his catalogue of the things that mattered. I remember thinking as I read it what an interesting and valuable thing it would be if some such confession — some such diploma thesis of unburdenment — was demanded of every statesman and author. Such an exaction would, at any rate, help to stem the Scotch competition in public life."

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH WE WATCH AN IMPULSIVE GOOD SAMARITAN'S DEEDS AND HEAR HIS SELF-REPROACHES

LACEY and I walked back together, and in Kingsway we were overtaken by Spanton, who had been to a debate at Essex Hall. I observed at once that he and Lacey were antipathetic. It was quite natural, for both are vigorous in their beliefs or impulses, and they look at life from totally different points of view. Lacey is a sentimentalist with roots in the past; Spanton is a scientific state-builder with his eyes on the future. Lacey is disillusioned and tired, content to get through each day as well as he can, expecting little. Spanton is confident and resolute.

On our way through Russell Square we passed a girl leaning against the railing of a house, crying. She was dressed in tawdry finery and her left hand was bound in a handkerchief. Lacey was at her side in a moment.

"What's it all about?" he asked, in his hearty, kind voice.

Amid her sobs she told the story. She had had a

quarrel with her man; he had struck her; the table fell with the things on it and she fell too, on a broken glass. He had turned her out.

Lacey examined her hand, which was badly cut and still bleeding.

"We must get this bound up," he said, and we found a cab and drove to a chemist's in New Oxford Street which is open all night, as, of course, Lacey knew.

"And what is the next thing?" he said. "Where do you live?"

"I couldn't go back there," the girl said, clinging to him.

She was a fine girl, rather on the coarse side, with a dull red complexion, thick lips, and blunt nose; but her large, dark-brown eyes were really splendid.

Lacey comforted her and reassured her, stroking her other hand.

Spanton said nothing.

There had been quarrels before, she explained, and the man's brutality had been increasing. This was the last. Nothing would get her there again.

"Very well, then," said Lacey, "we must find you a bedroom, and to-morrow I will see what I can do. It is too late now to talk."

He thought a while and then told the cabman to drive to a street off the Hampstead Road.

"When I was in business," he said, "I had an old carpenter named Dimmage. I dare say he's got a

room empty; we shall just catch him coming home after the 'Time, gentlemen, please.'"

Lacey was right. Mr. Dimmage had just returned and was locking up. His delight — rendered a shade more exuberant by his evening's libations — at recognizing his old employer was a joy to watch.

The story was soon told, and Mrs. Dimmage, extricated from bed, appeared, dishevelled and testy, at the head of the narrow stairs. She descended for the purpose of scrutinizing the girl a little more closely under the candle-light, and then retreated again.

"We've no room here," she said.

(It is an open question whether women are not *au fond* women's worst enemy.)

"But what about that truckle-bed where Jim used to be?" said the tactless but hero-worshipping Dimmage.

"There's no room in this house for stray women at this time of night," said Mrs. Dimmage.

Mr. Dimmage looked at us blankly.

"But, I say," he said, "it's a favour Mr. Lacey's asking. You wouldn't deny Mr. Lacey anything? After all he's done for us, too;" and he went upstairs and engaged in whispered conversation.

"You are good to me," said the girl, who still clung to Lacey's arm. "You'll come round in the morning, won't you? You're one of those that do keep their promises, aren't you?"

"Yes, worse luck," said Lacey. "But you've not got your room yet."

"Oh yes, I have," she said. "She's getting it ready now."

The girl was right. Mrs. Dimmage was conquered, as Mr. Dimmage informed us with many winks and grimaces.

"She's a good old soul," he said confidentially, "but damned partickler. But it'll be all right now."

And so we left, Mr. Lacey promising to be there at half-past nine.

"I call that a triumph for alcohol," he said, as we walked on. "If Dimmage had been a teetotaller we should never have got in. He would have been asleep, for one thing, and for another he would have had no courage to stand up to his wife. Alcohol is always called the friend of vice, but I have often found it the friend of virtue too."

All this while Spanton had been looking grimly on; and when we came away he at last spoke.

"It's a waste of time and energy, Mr. Lacey. All that you've done is to keep us out of our beds and reduce our store of vitality. There's no sense in helping a woman like that. She's no good to Society. She's a parasite. If you had an impulse to do something for her the best thing would have been to give her a shilling and leave her."

"Oh, rubbish," said Lacey. "We must do as we're made. I couldn't leave a poor creature like that. Common humanity wouldn't let me."

"That's because you don't reason," said Spanton. "If you had thought for a moment instead of being

so impulsive you would have realized that you were doing no good — in fact, only being self-indulgent. We have no right to go about the world squandering our emotions on worthless strangers. We ought to control and direct them, to help those that are worth helping."

"That's a counsel of perfection," said Lacey. "I am not perfect. I am just an ordinary person with a heart not made of logic or stone. If I see anyone in a hole I like to try and get them out. That's not self-indulgence, is it?"

"Almost always," said Spanton.

"Well, it's Christianity," said Lacey, "and that's good enough for me."

"Yes, but Christianity won't work," said Spanton. "It's never worked yet. Look at our army. Look at our navy. Look at our archbishops' salaries. Is there any connection between them and Galilee?"

"Rubbish," said Lacey. "Why, of course, Christianity works. It makes our conduct. And if you don't stop this vile talk I'll punch your head;" and so saying he stood still and began to take off his coat.

"All right," said Spanton, "I'll stop. But just see how true it was, what I said about Christianity not working. You've already forgotten the instruction about the other cheek."

A most irritating young man.

But Lacey was quick enough for him. "Of course I shouldn't do anything so abject as that," he said.

"My Christ is he who scourged the money changers out of the Temple. Come on!"

"That girl's an awful nuisance," said Lacey to me a day or so after. "She's fallen in love with me. I was afraid she would. It's my destiny to attract the wrong women. She's just a poor dumb animal full of gratitude, and I haven't a notion what to do about her. Your cold-blooded young Socialist is right: one should repress one's humanitarian impulses."

I asked him what he should do.

"I'm wondering," he said. "She wants to be my servant and work herself to death for me. I can see the twins' faces when they find her cleaning up my room! There's only one phrase with the twins for that kind of girl — 'brazen hussy.' What the good women will never understand about these others is that even in brazen hussying there are off moments when ordinary life has to be lived. Fortunately she doesn't know my address and old Dimmage won't tell her. I shall send her five pounds and say I have to go abroad for three months, and so wash my hands of her."

I strongly advised him to do this and offered to contribute to the sum. But he wouldn't have it.

"No," he said, "this is my show. I let myself in for it, and I must get out of it. Poor girl, I'm so sorry for her. Such a nice thing too; but hopeless, of course. When they've once tasted freedom they won't go back. How can they? What has service

to offer? Do you remember how in one of Byron's letters he bursts out in disgust, 'Nothing but virtue pays in this damned world.' He was right. Nearly everyone is experimenting with vice, yet nothing but virtue really pays. The difference between virtue and the other thing may be as slight as tissue paper, but there it is, and all our social system is based on virtue. Such a nice girl too. She ought to marry a policeman and beget life-guardsmen.

"There's a poem in that Chinese book you lent me," Lacey continued, "which I have learnt by heart and am trying to obey. It teaches one not to meddle. This wretched girl who is on my mind all comes of meddling, just as Spanton said. The poem — it's hundreds of years old — runs like this — it is quite short — only four lines:

I wander north, I wander south, I rest me where I please . . .
See how the river-banks are nipped beneath the autumn breeze!
Yet what care I if autumn's blasts the river-banks lay bare?
The loss of hue to river-banks is the river-banks' affair.

That's the way to live. Go your own way and don't care a hang for anyone. I wish I could do it!

"That poem's given me an idea too. To make a little collection of poems all of which are four lines long and no more. You'd get some fine things and it wouldn't tire anyone. Some day, when I've more time, I shall do this."

But, of course, he won't.

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH THE WYNNES AND OURSELVES MAKE A JOURNEY TO ITALY AND FIND THE MIDDLE AGES

SINCE the events described in the last chapter I have been a traveller. I forget if I have mentioned that Naomi has a brother Frank, a journalist, with a pretty wife and three children. We do not see very much of them, as they live out of London, but these children having been ordered the best kind of sea bathing, and Mr. Wynne — Frank, and Naomi's father — having generously put his hand deep into his pocket, and Naomi having talked me round, we all went to Rimini to bathe; because good authorities said that Rimini bathing was of the superlative best.

When I had at last consented I began (as often happens) to be enthusiastic. I used to go about London saying "Rimini, Rimini," just for the sheer joy of the syllables. For I can think of no other three, in that Italian language of beautiful syllables, that contain the suggestion of so much that is splendid and old and romantic. I pictured it on the grand scale, a little as though Hugo had sketched it, noble but decayed. I saw a crumbling fortress, an empty palace, vast, sun-baked streets, a cool, twilit cathedral,

and dark doorways and passages in which the clash of steel was still almost audible. That is how I began; but gradually, as I met travellers and conversed with them, these poetical anticipations lost their fine bloom.

Said one: "It's the very dickens of a place for mosquitoes."

Said his son, a healthy schoolboy, who was present: "I believe it's near San Marino. If I give you a couple of bob will you buy me some stamps?" (What a lot the young know!)

"If you are going to Rimini," said Dabney, "you must get Symonds and read up the Malatesta lot. They're awfully interesting. But perhaps you're going to write about them."

"No," I said, "I think not. I'm going to Rimini solely for bathing and mosquito bites."

A Scotch physician gave me advice of a different and totally unexpected variety. "Don't forget the Rimini beer," he said. "It's the best I ever tasted."

Rimini beer! Shade of Dante! But the doctor was right. The Rimini beer is wonderful, especially with the Rimini sun to create a thirst for it. Apollo and the brewer (who has, I regret to say, a German name) working in partnership can always lead to admirable results, but never more admirable than at Rimini.

One lady alone played the game. She threw up her hands in an ecstasy. "Rimini!" she crooned. "How delightful! Paolo and Francesca."

But the prettiest thing was said in a letter from a literary friend. "Lucky you!" he wrote, "and if you stay till October you will see the swallows and get some English news, for they always rest at Rimini on the way south."

Our party was enormous and a tremendous responsibility for me, who foolishly undertook to pilot it; for, in addition to ourselves, who knew a little French and Italian, there were two maids who knew none, one of them being the children's nurse, and the other Mrs. Wynne's new maid, who was advertised for as not objecting to going abroad, and replied that she was "fond of travail."

I pass over the horrors of the journey. No one who vividly remembered his railway experiences would ever go to Italy again; but Providence has a kindly way of blurring them or relegating them to a distant background behind Italian joys. One quaint experience the last stage offered. In the confusion of Bologna's crowded platforms, and the absence of any official who knew anything, and the lateness of our train, and the changing into the next, which was, like all Italian trains, packed with passengers before we could reach it, there had been no opportunity that I considered safe to buy any refreshments. As, therefore, the appalling journey lengthened out between Bologna and Rimini, where the line hits the Adriatic coast and thereafter clings to it for many miles, we were all conscious of the pangs of hunger.

In despair I explored the train for food, hoping

against hope, and came upon a peasant in a corner with a basket at his feet from which oozed a thick fluid. That it would prove to be inedible I was confident; but none the less I asked him what it was, and behold, when he opened the mouth of the basket it was eggs. To his immense astonishment I led him to the compartment which we had at last obtained, and, to his greater surprise, he watched us each consume one or more of his eggs broken into the cup of a pocket flask. Even Naomi, whose horror of a raw egg amounts in England to a mania, took one; even the children took one, with a reverence and distortion proper only to medicine.

The strange part of the story, which otherwise lacks all the elements of excitement, is, that when I offered the man some money he refused it. It had given him pleasure to be of use to us, he said. He would on no account accept any payment. Noble egg-merchant of Rimini, may you have many children, and may they have many children, and so come to repopulate and regenerate Italy! But, he said, if we really wished to make some return, he would greatly esteem a taste of the liquor which the flask contained and which some of us had poured into the broken eggs. I therefore handed him a cup of the national beverage of Caledonia, which he took at a gulp, and the last we saw of our good Samaritan was his honest, sunburned face in spasms of astonishment at its strength, and the last we heard of him was his strangling gasps as he fought with the unaccustomed

draught. I looked for him after in Rimini but never saw him more.

And so, after many many hours in grubby carriages, we reached Rimini late at night, which is the right thing to do, and in that dazed state that follows sudden entry in the dark into a strange town, after a fatiguing and noisy train, we were driven through narrow streets to the hotel: having chosen, for fun, the ancient posting-house of the centre rather than the new and splendid hostel of the *plage*. In spite of certain disabilities I think we were wise, for it made just the difference between being in Rimini and being anywhere — Ostend, say, or Dieppe — for all *plage* hotels are the same and all ancient posting-houses have their own character.

The Golden Eagle and Three Kings was our magnificent sign and we completely captured it. We had vast rooms in which gilt beds with canopies over them (like royal couches in a fairy tale) occurred as incidents, isolated as palm trees in the desert; while the gaily-painted ceilings were high above as the vault of heaven. Such a thing as a small room was unknown. The hostess was shrewd and masterful, with all the machinery of geniality. The host was not only landlord but housemaid, parlour-maid, cellar-man, and everything else. Heavy, pallid, puffy, and unbuttoned, with a kind face and a heavy moustache, he was to be met with on the stairs at all hours, carrying either a broom or a pail or both. We called him (Heaven forgive us!) the Golden

Eagle; but his consort was liker that commanding and predatory fowl. In addition there was an odd man or two in an apron, also busy with brooms and pails, and also the natural objective of the eagless's criticism; a head waiter (from Florence, for the season); a piccolo, who smiled ever and longed to be up to mischief but dared not; a kitchen staff; and two or three prim and superior daughters, or eaglets, glimpses of whom were occasionally to be caught in the hotel, avoiding their father, and whom, with their efficient mother, all in black, we met more than once returning from Mass. Such was the personnel of the Golden Eagle and Three Kings.

But at lunch and dinner sparkling young commercial travellers appeared from obscure regions of the building inaccessible to us, where no doubt the rooms approximated to the English size, and these would surround a long table and eat and drink and incessantly talk; but always first executing some courteous preliminaries from which emerged the senior, to take the head of the table.

Rimini has but this one hotel of any class at all, and one café, and this café, I observed, has but one habitué who wears evening dress; but he is so proud of it that his unceasing promenade before the little tables outside conveys the illusion of a Smart Set.

The city, I may say at once, is not the city of my dreams. I do not say it is disappointingly not so, for everything about it is so foreign and so interesting and (with the exception of the *plage*, the railway, and the

trams) so mediæval — such a feat of survival — that it is satisfying even to one who had expected too much. The town itself is small and half derelict, and a long way (in hot weather) from the sea. On the shore, for a mile and more, is a new settlement of villas and bathing-boxes, a casino and the great white *à la mode* hotel. This mile, inhabited wholly by strangers, comes to life in June and dies again in September, and has no dealings with the old town and the Golden Eagle and Three Kings whatever. Nor has the old town any dealings with the shore, for no one living at Rimini ever bathes. The only way in which old Rimini recognizes the sea is to circulate round the bandstand on Sundays and musical nights, otherwise it prefers to crumble in the sun, and recks nothing of salt water.

Rimini's streets are narrow and paved with stones chosen carefully for their unsuitability for such a purpose. Its houses are high and squalid, but most charmingly sheltered with green. Its palaces are now rookeries. The main street is entered from the plain through a massive gateway — the Porta Romana — and passing through the town widens first into an arcaded oval, with a monument in it celebrating Cæsar's crossing of the neighbouring Rubicon in 49 B.C., then narrows again; then becomes the side of the principal square, the Piazza Cavour, where the theatre, the post office, the Municipio, the café, and the one suit of evening clothes are; then narrows again to pass the Golden Eagle and Three Kings;

and after a further narrow period leaves the town by way of a stone bridge with five arches over the Marecchia, which was begun before Christ by Augustus and finished by Tiberius in A.D. 20; and so once more we enter the plain again. There are a few by-streets and the castle of the Malatestas and an amphitheatre, within the walls; and that is all. And everything has the disintegrating baked appearance of a city with a past.

The famous cathedral has a façade as unfinished and untidy as a peacock from behind, and it is usually deserted; but it is Rimini's best, still. Interesting to loiter here and ruminate upon its makers: chief of them the black Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, who built it, not only as a service for a God whom he too often forgot, but as a fitting resting-place when that orgy, his life, was over. His story is a dark one. He was born in 1417 and died in 1468. His imperious hawk-shaped head tells us that he could brook no opposition, and throughout his tempestuous career he did everything he wished, as Italian tyrants of the Middle Ages were peculiarly able to. Three wives at least he espoused and then murdered, but at last fell completely under the charm of the fair and gifted Isotta degli Atti, who had enough influence with him to force him to marry her and enough good fortune to survive him.

Sigismondo as a bold bad man has almost no superior in the annals of wilfulness and turpitude, but alongside his abnormal cruelties and excesses

was a devotion to art and philosophy which not only led him to invite Alberti here to design, and the sweet and simple Piero della Francesca to paint, and certain of the best sculptors to carve, his cathedral — but he entertained scholars and poets continually in his city of lawless passions, and himself brought hither from Greece the bones of the famous Neo-Platonist, Gemisthos Plethon, the father of the New Learning, and reinterred them in state in this Christian fane. Strange lurid times and strange anomalies in them!

Sigismondo's tomb, with the elephant pertaining to his crest, and Isotto's tomb near it (with Isotto herself as an angel on the altar) were both constructed in their lifetime and must have been visited continually by their intended occupants to see what progress was being made. His own tomb bears a cynical couplet which, with his descriptive name, sufficiently describes the man for posterity.

As for the most famous figures in Rimini, those two fated lovers of whom Dante first sang — Paolo and Francesca — one hears nothing of them in the city to-day, and sees only picture post-cards representing a modern meretricious painting of the hapless pair. It was an ancestor of Sigismondo (he himself left no lawful descendants), Giovanni the Lame, who was the husband of Francesca. And Francesca loved too well her husband's brother Paolo the beautiful, and Giovanni had both of them put to death in 1288, when Dante was a young man of twenty-three.

But the sweetest and rarest life to think upon in this forsaken temple is that of its architect — Leon Battista Alberti, the first Admirable Crichton of a period when Crichtons were almost the rule. Of noble birth, Alberti developed his many-sided genius very early. He controlled the wildest horses almost by a word; he could jump his own height without a run; he could throw a coin accurately over the tallest building; none could beat him at wrestling or archery; he painted, modelled, and was a superb musician. To his skill and taste as an architect this cathedral testifies, as do the façade of S. Maria Novella at Florence and the old Ruccellai palace there. He dived deeply into physical science, read everything that was readable in those early days before printing, was among the keenest of the Neo-Platonists, and, like Leonardo after him, a mountaineer. He worshipped beautiful things, jewels, flowers, landscapes, and was peculiarly delighted by the spectacle of healthy and handsome old men. When one of his dogs died he wrote a funeral oration for it. Among his literary works were a treatise on the family, essays on art and science, and an autobiography. Like Michael Angelo and Leonardo, his greatest successors, he never married, and his wealth was always at the disposal of his friends. Such was Leon Battista Alberti, the builder of this cathedral, who was dead nine years before our Edward V came to the throne.

Neither universal genius nor tyrant is to be found

in Rimini to-day. The cathedral is forlorn and deserted; the castle of the Malatestas is a prison; no fierce or genial despot stirs the languid populace to activity. They loaf about in déshabille, gossip, sip their coffee, read the papers, and care for nothing. Sun-beetles, every one of them; that is, in summer. I cannot conceive of Rimini in winter at all.

But the girls of Rimini. Ah! Olive coloured, with regular features a little rounded, tall, straight, with level eyes that never wander, they are the most beautiful things there. They walk proudly in couples, talking, laughing; they are never seen with men. They come along so statelily and easily, like sailing ships. At other times they look out of the windows, but still never at men. Where else are beautiful women so disdainful?

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH WE LUXURIATE IN A TIDELESS SEA AND WITNESS A BLOODLESS BATTLE

LET me say at once that not only is the Rimini bathing the best in the world, so far as I know, but the sands are the best too; and the fishing-boats that flit in and out of the little harbour have the best burnt-umber sails.

The English are learning to enjoy *plage* life, but they are not naturally ready for its beguilements as the French and Italians are; while the Germans, after their wont, overdo it, with a coarse self-consciousness and their always visible intention of extracting the last drop of material bliss. The Italians are children in the water and on the sands: the dark, hairy men, the placid, olive-hued women with subterranean fires. At Rimini, where it is really hot, one lives all day in bathing clothes, alternately in the water and out; but from twelve to one everyone is eating, and from one to three everyone is asleep — except the indefatigable children. In those hours the sands under the tent awnings present the appearance of a battle-field, strewn with the prismatic

dead. This to the human eye; to the eye of a sand insect the scene must be more like the South Downs to a Wealden labourer, such are the undulating contours of the full-length Italian parents who repose in profusion and negligence on every hand.

These parents were more entertaining to me than any of the younger bathers: they were so patiently happy; so sensibly careless of their habiliments; so wisely unmindful of their bulk; such creatures of comfort. Their pretty daughters and slender sons had their vanities; the parents were without any.

I had often wondered when abroad what kind of impression one makes. All these swarthy Italian men, for example, looked like tenors: but what type did I, for instance, suggest to the Italian eye, if any? There are many more casts of face in England than in Italy, and several more than in France; and now that whiskers have gone out and clean shaving is the fashion it must puzzle the continental caricaturist to fix the English type. But of one thing I feel certain, that our little party broke no hearts. No dark Italian eyes looked yearningly our way: the Carusi will always win there.

Few of the Italians, young or old, thought of swimming. Their pleasure was to stand about or make lazy voyages on the double-canoe rafts, meanwhile carrying on conversations with their tent at terrific range. Only the English or an eccentric native thought of swimming, and the English, so far as I know, were confined to our own party.

I say we were the only English; but is that quite just? For on the first morning, while I was arranging with the bathing master in his little *guichet* for our tickets and so forth, he sent for one of the bathing men to be our particular attendant, on the grounds that he was English, or, at any rate, knew English. "The Englishman," therefore, he became in our minds; but what English! He had one word — "awry" — which meant the very opposite, "All right," and this he used continually. He could also say "ole man." No more. The secret of his reputation as a linguist was a sojourn he had made in San Francisco; but it is extremely easy, I take it, in San Francisco, to consort only with your own countrymen, no matter what race is yours, and therefore avoid the necessity of learning any new tongue. The Englishman, however, was our friend. He taught the children to swim; he placed his double canoe at our exclusive disposal at a heavy cost; he fixed the awning of the tent; he procured additional deck-chairs; he brought bottles.

And once he fought for us. During his momentary absence one morning we had received some attention from another of the men, and the Englishman had heard about it. Such a liberty was, of course, outrageous and must be punished; and the Englishman set to work to chastise this upstart and interloper. The attendants had cubicles at the head of the little pier, side by side, and the Englishman and his foe chose this site for their battle, for all the world to see.

They began by calling each other names at a distance of a yard; then they closed up and shouted these and other names into each other's very mouths. Then they took to fisticuffs. Not, however, in any vulgar northern way, upon each other's body, but on the doors and walls of each other's cubicle. They fought like this for ten minutes, beating the woodwork mercilessly, every blow being accompanied by a new epithet, which it is fortunate was not in any language that we understood; and then they disappeared within, each in his own lair. For a while there was silence, to the intense regret of the *plage*, but not for long; for the Englishman would think of something good which he had not yet called the other, and would come out and call it him, with a knock-out blow on the panel; and the other would remember a terrible insult which had been hurled at him a year or two ago and which, in the excitement of the past few minutes, had escaped his memory, and he would fire this into the Englishman with an undercut on the pitch pine. They came out so rhythmically that one could almost believe they were consulting slang dictionaries in the meanwhile; and then the warfare gradually died down, as the dictionaries gave out, and in half an hour they were in friendly intercourse again. From the circumstance that the other man ever after avoided us, we gathered that the Englishman had won.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH AN EXPERIMENT IS MADE IN QUICKENING THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE YOUNG, WITH DISTRESSING RESULTS

MRS. FRANK, I have not perhaps said, is one of the serious mothers who wish to make her children clever from the very first, and she has enlisted my services in the campaign, although I am not clever yet. We all stay on the sand until four, and then there are two hours for the twins and their small sister before bedtime. It is this interlude which Mrs. Frank has entreated me to spend now and then, say three times a week, in instruction.

"Be original with them," she says, "there's a good Kent. Make them think and see."

"Heavens, woman," I reply, "why not save time by telling me to be perfect? What's their father about, anyway? Why isn't he teaching his brood?"

"Oh, Frank's too lazy," says his wife. "Besides, he hasn't any patience. He hates to be interrupted with questions — not a little because he can't answer them."

I am lazy too, and am equally afraid of questions, but it has long been understood in this world that I

cannot say no, while ever since I took charge of Mr. Bemerton's shop I have been the natural prey of all mendicants. Moreover, Naomi supporting her sister-in-law's request, I had to say yes once more.

I borrowed my plan from Spanton. You remember what he said about his school lectures and his description of the lives of the labourers. Well, I took that as a basis, and, applying the idea to younger minds, began a little story for these children which should have the effect of making them realize, although so young, their dependent position in the world, and their indebtedness to the world and its workers not only for their luxuries but their necessities. At first it would be merely a matter of curiosity quickened and satisfied, but later, as they grew older and went to school, it might make them the more ready not to harbour insularity and arrogance.

We had a chapter at a time. My story began thus:

What the World does for Prue

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Prue. Or, to be more exact, there is a little girl named Prue, for she is living in London at this minute and is still only ten years old. Prue has no brothers and sisters, but I don't think that this matters very much to her happiness, for she has many friends, not only of her own age but bigger too, quite grown up, in fact, and also a very busy mind which leads her to be interested in a large number of things and so keeps

her contented. Her father goes into London in the morning at half-past nine by the Hammer-Smith Tube from Gloucester Road, and he comes back in the afternoon so exactly at the same time every day that Prue can be sure of meeting him by the greengrocer's and florist's on the way, where he buys some flowers for Prue's mother, who is an invalid. On Saturday, however, he does not go to his business at all, but in the morning he plays at golf in the Old Deer Park at Richmond (close to Kew Gardens), and in the afternoon he takes Prue to a picture gallery or a concert. On Sunday afternoons they always go either to the South Kensington Museum, which they are getting to know by heart, from Constable's water-colours of Brighton to Michael Angelo's "David," and from teak houses at Benares to lace caps for babies in the time of Queen Anne; or to the British Museum, which they know also equally well, from the Elgin Marbles to the little Tanagra family groups in terra-cotta, and from Egyptian mummies to Staffordshire jugs with poetry on them. You have no idea how interesting a museum can be if you take it easily and have someone to describe the things to you. The mistake people make in museums is to try and see too much, as if they were going to die to-night.

Prue also has a governess named Miss Fry, and a considerable library of her own, and a dachshund named Herr Bandy, and threepence a week pocket money. She has fair hair and blue eyes, and would

much rather be laughing than not, in spite of her visits to museums. And that, I think, is enough introduction to Prue.

The purpose of this story is to give you the same idea as that given to Prue by her father, of the thanks which you owe to the world at large; and when I say you I mean all of us, but particularly those living at this moment in England. For I want you to think of Prue as a little girl standing on England in the flat map of the world which we call Mercator's Projection, to whom from all directions steamers and trains are hurrying. Each of these steamers and trains is bringing her something that is necessary for everyday life, to eat or to wear or to use, and were it not for these steamers and trains, and the sailors and engineers on them, and stevedores who loaded them and others who will unload them, and the workmen who made or dug or gathered the articles they are loaded with, that little girl would very likely die or, at any rate, be no better than a savage. And again when I say that little girl I mean you and me and all of us prosperous, protected, English people who have only to go into the Stores and lay down our money to get all we want, and, for the most part, never think of the way in which men have been toiling under hot suns or freezing skies or in stifling cities, mostly on poor wages, to provide us with it. We take such things for granted: just as Prue did until her eccentric Uncle Frank, who always did such odd things, came back from India, where he was a

judge, for a holiday, and told her a little about the origin of things, as I am going to tell you.

That was the start, and it was very successful, except that the twins both wondered why I had made a little girl the heroine.

"Well," I said, "it is because girls are more interesting. I wrote it really for Jill, only she is too young for it at the moment. Little boys don't make such good stories as little girls."

"Why?" they asked.

"Ah," I replied (for I am not altogether a fool), "you must ask your father. He knows everything."

Now for the real beginning, the first chapter:

It was a bright morning in April. Prue woke up at seven, half an hour before she need get up. This is a very pleasant thing to do. She knew it was seven because she looked at her watch. Her watch! This is rather serious, because few things that we use in daily life contain the results of more labour in many countries than a very ordinary watch, and if I tell you all about that now, we shall not get back to Prue for many pages. I had forgotten that Prue's watch would come in so soon. Let us then postpone the examination of her watch for a little, because I want to tell you how she began to think of this dependence of hers (and ours) upon the rest of the world. She lay there in her little bed all cosy between the sheets and blankets. (Sheets and blankets, did I say?

This story is not only never going to end, I can see, but is never going to begin either, for Prue's sheets jump us straight away to Carolina in North America, and the cotton fields, and the negroes at work there, and the great Atlantic steamers being laden with the bales, and the Lancashire cotton mills, and the girls in clogs, and the boys thinking of football as they work, and the broad, Lancashire dialect filling the air, and . . . do you see what a task we have before us? While as for Prue's blankets, they take us farther still, right away to Australia, to a great sheep farm with thousands and thousands of sheep, and the hot sun, and the dry Bush stretching as far as the eye can reach, and the rouseabouts driving the sheep up to the shearing sheds, and rows of half-naked men shearing and shearing, with the sheep kicking and struggling beneath them. Think of the heat of it all, and the dust and thirst and weariness, and nothing to do when evening comes in this wilderness but rest and get ready for the next day! And then the despatch of the wool in wagons to the nearest train, and the train going to the port and the long voyage to the factory in England where it is to be spun. How many sheep's warm coats contributed to make one of your blankets? You never thought of that before, perhaps. But still we have not reached the awakening of Prue's consciousness on this great matter of herself and the world.)

She lay there in that blessed half-awake, half-asleep state for some minutes, until she began to feel

something warm on her cheek, and realized that it was the sun. And she suddenly thought how wonderful it was that there should be such a substance as glass which can keep out the cold but lets light and warmth through it, and, idly thinking, she began to wonder how glass is made, and when it was discovered, and what people did before they had it, and either how draughty or how dark their rooms must have been; and she determined to ask her father and Miss Fry about it; and that was the beginning of this story.

From the window as she lay there, her eyes strayed all round the room, and everything that they saw set her wondering afresh. It was a very nice little bedroom. The wall-paper was white, with little bunches of wall-paper flowers tied with blue ribbon all over it — the kind of wall-paper that does not look like anything but what it is and is therefore happy and restful, and very different from the wall-paper that was there when Prue had measles last year. That had a curly, twisted pattern on it which, when Prue had fever, turned into animals and frightened her; and then it was badly hung in some places, and Prue would lie there for hours wishing that it fitted and longing to get up and alter it. But the new paper was gay and properly pasted on, and Prue liked it very much.

On the walls were a few pictures — one or two coloured ones from the Christmas numbers in cheap frames (glass again!) and the "Angels' heads," by

Sir Joshua Reynolds from the National Gallery, and the little King Philip on his pony, by Velasquez, from the Wallace Collection, and an illuminated text from Aunt Mildred, very beautifully done in gold and water-colours—"The Lord is my Shepherd," and a Shakespeare date calendar. There were ornaments on the mantelpiece—a gaily-painted wooden figure from Munich, two Japanese vases, a tiny cat and a tiny dog in brass, painted just like life, from Vienna, and a serpentine cup from the Lizard. In the fire-place was coal and wood all ready to be lit when Prue had a cold. Before the window was her dressing-table with a mirror over it, and her brush and comb and so forth on little mats with fringe round them. Then there were the curtains, and the blind, and the wardrobe of white wood with a little painted pattern, and the chest of drawers, and the washing-stand with soap and toothbrush and so forth, and the chairs. There was also a little hanging bookshelf, and on the floor was a bright green carpet.

Prue lay in her little brass bed and looked at these things one by one while the sun continued to pour through the windows and the time to get up came nearer and nearer. And all the while she was getting up she was thinking about these things, and how they were made, and where they came from, and when she came downstairs she told her father about it.

We have seen something about the origin of the sheets and the blankets of Prue's bed. But what

about the mattress and the pillows and the framework. Just as before there could be the blankets there had to be sheep with fleece on their backs, so before there could be this mattress there had to be horses, for it was stuffed with horsehair, the long hairs combed from their tails chiefly in Russia, South America, and Australia. But, you say, the hair in a horse's tail is long and straight, while the hair that one can pull out of mattresses is short and curly. That is true; but the curl has been put there artificially, for a number of processes have to be gone through between the combing of the tail and Prue's slumbers on the mattress, and curling the hair is one of the most important, or there would be no spring to it.

And just as sheep and horses had to live before there could be blankets or mattresses, so did geese have to cackle over commons and be killed for the market before Prue could lay her head on that soft pillow. The goose is a familiar enough bird; a much rarer bird contributed to keep Prue warm at nights by supplying her with the beautiful soft quilt that lay on the top of her bed — the eider duck. The eider duck is a bird that lives in very cold regions, such as Spitzbergen and Greenland and Iceland and the north of Norway. The down comes from her breast and is plucked by herself to cover her eggs and keeps them warm. Having marked down an eider-duck's nest, the down-hunter takes away all its contents, and this he does again and again at intervals of a few days until he guesses that the eider-

duck's patience is almost exhausted. He then leaves the eggs and down undisturbed, for fear that she will lay no more. The business of collecting down has become so important that artificial nests are made to which the birds gladly come, and in which, in spite of the way they are treated, they bravely go on laying eggs. From each of these nests half a pound of down is collected each breeding season; but before it is ready to be put into quilts it has to be washed and cleaned to such an extent that the half-pound has dwindled to a quarter. It all does not sound very gentlemanly, does it? but there are worse things than that in store for us. Well-to-do little girls in London cannot be made comfortable without a good deal of suffering going on in other parts of the world.

Take the looking-glass, for example, over there on the dressing-table: what about the brightness at the back of it which makes it reflect, and reflect not only what is in front of it but, as you have probably discovered by looking sideways at it, that which is apparently wholly out of its range too. I must confess that this strange power of a mirror amazes me as much as its ordinary gift of reflecting what is straight in front of it amazes a dog. The reflecting power of a mirror is obtained by spreading mercury or quicksilver on the back; but before this can be done the mercury has to be obtained, and that process is one of the most dangerous to men.

Quicksilver is a most delightful plaything. The first school to which I was sent, a school for girls and

boys, was kept by a little old Quaker lady with highly-magnifying, gold-rimmed spectacles, who, when we had been good, used to bring out a little bottle of quicksilver and pour great shining drops from it on the green baize table, and it would run about in all directions. No doubt she explained the origin and nature of mercury as it ran, but I have forgotten that. All that I remember and have always remembered is that the presence of the quicksilver proved that we had been good and that everyone was happy; and it remains in my mind as a sign of content. This little old lady with the gold-rimmed spectacles kept also a casket containing those yellow, round, gelatine lozenges which look like sovereigns, and which confectioners often use to mend broken windows with. One of them was given to any child who coughed. You should have heard what a lot of coughing there was!

There I stopped the first lesson; and, as it happened, there the experiment stopped permanently. For I had let loose the furies! For the rest of that evening and the whole of the next morning, before we got them into the sea, the children did nothing but ask questions as to the origin of this and that. We were in despair, and my unpopularity reached a point almost beyond endurance. Frank avoided his family as though it owed him money; Wynne was undisguisedly testy, and even Mrs. Frank confessed that children's intelligences can be overstimulated.

"At any rate," she said, "at Rimini and in summer. You must wait till we get back and it is colder."

I accepted the decree with composure.

"At any rate," I said, "you will admit that the idea was good."

"It depends," she said, "on Frank. If he returns to his wife I will forgive you."

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH WE MAKE THE MISTAKE OF PREFERRING "RICH EYES" TO COMFORT, AND TASTE THE QUESTIONABLE PLEASURES OF A MINUTE REPUBLIC

WE made an excursion or so, but not with any avidity; the sea was too good to leave, and it was the sea that we had come all this way to enjoy, as one cannot enjoy it at home except on days that are so few and far between as by their very rarity to make for misgivings rather than delight. It was also so hot that to be in the train at all was a distress, while to be in the train in the middle hours was martyrdom; and to be in a strange town in the middle hours was discomfort too. But as it seemed wrong to be so near Ravenna and not see it, we made a great effort and were away before seven one lovely morning. It was a day of interesting sights and associations; but how the call of the placid, wet exhilarating Adriatic sounded in our ears the while!

Ravenna has had two immense losses: first the sea, which gradually withdrew from the town centuries ago; and then the Pinetum, which, after centuries of existence, was burned down not many years since.

The nearness of such a forest must have both sweetened and cooled the city; to-day its heat can be pitiless.

The two lodestars of Ravenna are the exile poets Dante and Byron — but Dante, of course, far outshines that other. Byron is an accident here; Dante gives Ravenna most of its lustre, for here he made his home for many years after Florence turned him forth; here he wrote most of the "Divine Comedy"; here he died. We saw his tomb, and afterwards we saw his bones in their wooden coffin in the library of the old Camaldulensian monastery of Classe, now a civic building with an immense collection of Dante literature. Here, too, we were shown by the custodian a little illuminated Book of Hours that belonged to Mary Queen of Scots, and is as pretty as a Kate Greenaway calendar and indeed rather like one; but how it came to be at Ravenna, I cannot say. And where it ought to be, were there a general restitution of foreign treasures to their rightful situations, I cannot say either.

One other thing we saw in this museum — the bedstead on which Garibaldi's wife, Anita, died in 1849, during the flight from the Austrians; and a few minutes later we saw a little company of Garibaldi's veterans, lame and decrepit, place a wreath on the patriot's statue, just by the Hotel Byron, amid apathy which would be striking anywhere, but among Italians was astounding. Not a soul but ourselves and some errand boys watched or followed.

We had lunch at the Hotel Byron, in a vast salon, on the polished floor of which I seemed to hear his capricious lordship's club foot; for this was his home for two years, in 1819–1821, when it was called the Palazzo Rasponi, and here he consoled himself with his large, blonde, stupid Guiccioli; here he wrote myriad letters to Murray; and here Shelley stayed with him and despatched that amusing missive to Thomas Love Peacock, detailing not only the spoiled poet's extraordinary habits but also his extraordinary house-mates. "Lord Byron gets up at *two*. I get up, quite contrary to my usual custom, but one must sleep or die, like Southey's sea-snake in 'Kehama,' at twelve. After breakfast we sit talking till six. From six till eight we gallop through the pine forests which divide Ravenna from the sea; we then come home and dine, and sit up gossiping till six in the morning. I don't suppose this will kill me in a week or fortnight, but I shall not try it longer. Lord B.'s establishment consists, besides servants, of ten horses, eight enormous dogs, three monkeys, five cats, an eagle, a crow, and a falcon; and all these, except the horses, walk about the house, which every now and then resounds with their unarbitrated quarrels, as if they were the masters of it. . . . After I have sealed my letter, I find that my enumeration of the animals in this Circean Palace was defective, and that in a material point. I have just met on the grand staircase five peacocks, two guinea hens, and an Egyptian crane. I wonder who all these animals were before

they were changed into these shapes." Odd to have this letter in one's mind in this now highly respectable building, where the only animals are men, women, and waiters.

For the rest, I think now of Ravenna chiefly as a city of mosaic churches under a sky of brass, and wonder and wonder how — even with the Pinetum and the abounding Guiccioli — Byron can have been willing to stay there so long.

We returned from the little wayside station of Classe, a mile or so outside Ravenna, in order to visit the vast deserted fane of Sant' Apollinaris in Classe Fuori, which rears its huge bulk from the plain like a mammoth. This basilica was built in the sixth century and seems likely to stand for fourteen centuries more, if permitted to; it is empty and forlorn, with a wretched old custodian to open the doors upon its lost magnificence, for though the mosaics remain, our friend Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta of Rimini carried off its marble in 1449. Past this church rode Byron almost daily on his way to the pine forest.

On another day we drove from Rimini to San Marino — a day ill-spent indeed, for the sun shone, and our backs were to the sea all the way there, and returning it was too late for bathing. Why does one do these things? In England one can resist the deadly lure of the excursion; but abroad, no.

San Marino means two horses and a carriage with an awning — in our case two carriages with awnings

and four horses, at twenty-five lire the carriage. And for what? For a long, dull, dusty drive between vineyards to a baking rock and back again. This rock is the centre of the republic of San Marino, and I do not deny that its little city is piled bravely upon it; but the wise traveller will permit the camera to make the journey for him. Having left Rimini at seven we were there by half-past ten, and we had not been within the gates twenty minutes before I found one of the drivers and told him that we would return at once. Idle breath! No one returns at once, or does anything at once, in these parts. Impossible, he said. The horses were worn out with the journey. The sun was too powerful. We could leave at three — not a moment sooner. Here then we remained, bound to this blistering crag, like so many Prometheus's, for four hours; while the sea sparkled for us only ten miles away. As a matter of fact, we could have got off earlier had I known and insisted. It was not the fatigue of the horses, it was not the heat, that detained us; but one of the drivers was courting a San Marino girl.

I warn all intending visitors to San Marino that after having bought some of its absurd postage-stamps, on the sale of which it subsists, and attempted to eat its inferior food, there is, in hot weather, nothing whatever to do. To climb to the citadel is too exhausting; to explore the public buildings is impossible, after Rimini's cathedral, for if there is one more ridiculous thing than another it

is a toy republic. San Marino once belonged to Urbino, and, declining to be joined to the Papal states in 1631, it has remained independent. The population is about ten thousand, chiefly peasants, who scratch the rock with hoes and breed cattle, and the Government consists of a Grand Council of sixty life members, of which a third are nobles, while a smaller Supreme Council of twelve are chosen from these. You see them on the picture post-cards, which compete with the stamps for the money of the stranger, and it is a few minutes' beguilement to endeavour to set the point of a pin between the nobles and the others.

So what did we do? We sat on a little balcony of the inn, overlooking a tiny piazza, and watched such life as the place has, which became almost galvanic when, after a terrible cracking of whips, a mule rounded the corner dragging behind it a water-cart, and all the republicans swarmed about this cart with vessels in which to carry off the precious fluid at so much a litre.

That was the last of our follies. For the rest of the time we were in Rimini we made Rimini suffice — bathing or watching the sea and its serene yellow sails all the day, and afterwards taking short lazy walks in the cool of the evening — now beside the river, from the bridge to the harbour mouth and back again, past all the activities of this little port of fishermen; now round the walls of the town; now in the by-streets; and now down to the sea again,

after dinner, to see the moon and perhaps hear a little music.

Except for mosquito bites we all kept well, in spite of the heat and in defiance of the prophecies of many friends, who took the gloomiest views of Italian drinking water. But the mosquitoes! There is no preparation against mosquitoes sold by Italian chemists that we did not rub on our luckless skins; yet all in vain. We came at last to believe that it is an Italian form of humour, this preparation, under the name of preventives, of expensive delicacies dear to the mosquito palate — an Italian joke against the English. Be that as it may, nothing did any good; while as for the little cones which we burned at night, filling the room with a thick aromatic smoke guaranteed to disgust these insects more than anything else, I used to wake up and hear them drawing great draughts of it into their lungs as if it were ozone.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH TWO MODERN LOVERS LAY THEIR CASES BEFORE ME AND I DO NOTHING FOR EITHER

I HAVE had two lovers to see me: such different ones too. The first was Dollie Heathcote, very nervous — for him; which means that his eyeglass dropped ten times in a quarter of an hour instead of only five times. If he would wear a cord this would not matter; but as he has an objection to do so, a great deal of his time is spent on the floor, which, in one so thoughtful of the knees of his trousers, is a curious anomaly.

"Look here, Mr. Falconer," said Dollie, "you know the world and you're married. What do you advise me to do? Do you think I'm really a marrying man?"

"Not impetuously," I replied.

"Oh," he said, "no rotting. You see, it's like this. I'm awfully keen on Ann and she's keen on me, I believe, but I've had a bit of a facer lately. There's my brother Dick, for example, a much better sort than I am — much steadier and domesticated and all that — well, he's just left his wife for no other reason

than because he's tired of her. Whether there's anyone else, I don't know; fellows at the Club tell me there always is. But Dick swears there isn't. Anyway, he's gone. That's one thing. Another thing is that I had a fearful jaw the other day from an old aunt of mine who says it's the cruellest and wickedest thing there is to be engaged to a girl for a long time and not marry her; because the girl's losing the best years of her life. That set me thinking, because don't you see there's always the possibility that Ann, although she doesn't mind knocking about with me, might, if she were free, meet some other Johnnie whom she would want to marry at once."

"How would you like to see her doing that?" I asked.

"Oh, I couldn't stand it," said Dollie.

"Then why don't you marry now?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "for one thing, Ann doesn't seem to want to, and for another, I don't much want to myself."

"But you're so keen on her, you say," I remarked.

"Yes, of course I am. But the word husband's so stuffy."

I groaned for the younger generation.

"Yes," he went on, "I'm glad you agree with me. And there's something so ghastly in the thought of settling down, don't you know."

"Well, that's what so many people like — the settlement of it. But look at your friend Farrar, he's not exactly a home-bird, yet he and his wife seem

very happy, and they lead, married, very much the same life that you do, unmarried."

"That's true," said Dollie. "But he's Farrar, and I'm not. I'm another Johnnie altogether — the sort that's ever so much happier engaged than he will be when he's married; and so's Ann, I believe; but the silly thing about it is that we're only so happy now because the idea is we're going to be married — otherwise she wouldn't be allowed to go about with me at all. Isn't that what you call a bally paradox? But anyhow, what do you advise?"

"Suppose I were to say," I replied, "that my advice to you was to marry at once."

He started nervously. "Oh, I say," he said. "Not really. But that would be awfully risky, you know. Look at poor old Dick — suppose I got tired like that too? And it's not impossible, you know. Why, I was awfully fond of Naomi once, and then you remember Miss Verity. I was fearfully gone there for a while. Do you really think I ought to make the plunge?"

"Then suppose," I said, "that my advice was, go to Ann and say that you have realized that you don't love her enough" — he started nervously again — "and wish to break off your engagement."

"Oh, but," he said, "I don't. I should be miserable without her. And so would she."

"Well," I said, "since no practical advice would meet your views, as I suspected, the only thing I can give is a sermon, or address, on the dangers of the

new cult of diversion which deprives the character of any intensity, and leave you to draw the right moral. But I'm not going to do that. You are both obviously very weak in what the phrenologists call philo-progenitiveness. If you could only develope that bump the problem would solve itself. That, however, is a counsel of perfection. My advice, then, is this: in the words of an illustrious statesman, cultivate an attitude of expectant hesitancy."

Dollie looked very blank.

"Put in another way," I said, "wait and see."

"Oh, I say," he said, "no chaff!"

"But I really mean it," I said.

"Honour bright?" he asked.

"Absolutely," I said.

"Thanks awfully," he replied, shaking my hand. "Tophole. That's a great load off my mind."

I was glad to see him go.

The bore about the people who ask for advice is that they never tell everything; and it is just the reservations that make the case complex.

The second lover was poor Spanton.

"How's Nancy?" I asked.

His face fell. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I wanted to see you about Nancy. She has broken off our engagement. I had her letter this morning, and of course I went down at once to put the matter right. You see, she has been away on a visit and must have come under some foolish influence. She's a very impressionable girl. I couldn't get her to

admit this, but I'm sure it's the case. Nothing that I said was any good. For the moment she is out of her mind, I think. She simply refused to discuss it, merely saying that she had discovered that she did not feel for me as deeply as she ought to if we were to marry. So absurd to talk like that at her age and with her inexperience, when, as I told her, I had deliberately chosen her — picked her out from all the other girls I knew."

Luckily he sprang up at this moment and began to pace about, or he would have seen my face.

"I went on to remind her," he continued, "of the campaign we had planned for ourselves — my great social amelioration programme — and showed her how she was breaking faith not only with me, but with the country, the race. Useless. She merely repeated her original phrase like a parrot. I left her and appealed to Mr. Freeland, but he said he should not interfere. Nancy was old enough to know. Don't worry her now, he said: give her another week's holiday. I saw Mrs. Freeland, who is, of course, as you must have noticed, desperately out of date; and she, too, declined to fight for me. She was very sorry, she said, and hoped that Nancy knew her own mind; but how much better to discover a mistake early rather than late! You know how people always say this, and when it is a mistake I agree with them; but this is not a mistake, but the simulacrum of a mistake. How can Nancy know her own mind when she has not got one? She is a dear, sweet

girl, and I was devoted to her—am devoted to her—but she has no mind. It was I who was to give her that."

What was I to say to him? Was I to say—what was of course evident to anyone but himself—that she had found some simple fellow on her own level whom she liked better? Was I to say, "You silly young ass, you deserve to lose her for not taking her as she was and loving that, instead of playing the dictator and unsexing her? For the best thing in the world is a pretty, affectionate girl true to her nature, and the silliest thing is a pretty, affectionate girl pretending to be something she is not."

Either of these speeches I might have made, but instead I sympathized with him and advised him to wait a little longer before confessing complete failure.

"No," he said; "her attitude was final. I don't feel as if I could reopen the matter. All those laughing sisters, too."

(I liked to hear that human note.)

"No, I shall go abroad for a while and then gather up the fragments and begin again. But of course I shan't marry now. That's the end of women for me."

And with these words, which the ironical gods must be so tired of hearing, he strode away.

It was, I must admit, a little to my relief. It is difficult to take these perplexities of other persons seriously. One somehow has the feeling that one's own wedding should be the last.

Spanton does not admit that he has been in any

way to blame about Nancy. He is still the same ardent futurist, unshaken in anything but woman's stability (in which, however, of course, he never had much belief); yet, none the less, when we were on a motor bus the other day, bowling down the Hampstead Road like an avalanche, I saw a wistful expression come into his face as he watched two lovers on the seat in front of us. They were quite common, from the superior point of view, he a shop assistant or clerk and she a clerk or shop assistant, and her engagement ring was only a pearl surrounded by five little turquoises; but they were as near as possible to each other, and one happiness did for both, and the only words I caught were his, in a lull in the racket made by our terrible vehicle, when he finished a sentence by saying, "And of course I shall *have* to obey you *then*." A sickening sentiment for Spanton to hear, yet none the less, although a spasm crossed his face, it did not kill the wistful look.

What I am now wondering is whether he has learnt anything from what has happened. Because, of course, many of us learn so badly, and Spanton is so lacking in humility, which is the seed-of-learning's most fruitful soil. That Nancy has made no mistake, I feel convinced; nor will any bitterness be hers. There she is fortunate. One of the hardest things in life, and for women, is that it is only by failing to make one woman happy that many a man acquires the experience which is to serve him in succeeding with another.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH A COMPANY OF INTELLIGENT AND FOR THE MOST PART CONCEITED MEN MEET MORE THAN THEIR MATCH

I STILL tingle with mortification over an experience at Dabney's last evening, the only satisfaction being that others tingle with me. We were talking of the supernatural — that unprofitable but endlessly alluring theme — and most of us had cited an instance, without, however, producing much effect. Among the strangers to me was a little man with an anxious white face, whom Rudson-Wayte had brought, and he watched each speaker with the closest attention, but said nothing. Then Dabney, wishing to include him in the talk, turned to him and asked if he had no experience to relate, no story that contained an inexplicable element.

He thought a moment. "Well," he said, "not a story in the ordinary sense of the word: nothing, that is, from hearsay, like most of your examples. Truth, I always hold, is not only vastly stranger than fiction, but also vastly more interesting. I could tell you an occurrence which happened to me personally,

and which oddly enough completed itself only this afternoon."

We begged him to begin.

"A year or two ago," he said, "I was in rooms in Great Ormond Street — an old house on the Holborn side. The bedroom walls had been distempered by a previous tenant, but the place was damp and great patches of discoloration had broken out. One of these — as indeed often happens — was exactly like a human face; but more faithfully and startlingly like than is customary. Lying in bed in the morning, putting off getting up, I used to watch it and watch it, and gradually I came to think of it as real — as my fellow-lodger, in fact. The odd thing was that while the patches on the walls grew larger and changed their contours, this never did. It remained identically the same.

"While there, I had a very bad attack of influenza, with complications, and all day long I had nothing to do but read or meditate, and it was then that this face began to get a firmer hold of me. It grew more and more real and remarkable. I may say that it dominated my thoughts day and night. There was a curious turn to the nose, and the slant of the forehead was unique. It was, in fact, full of individuality: the face of a man apart, a man in a thousand.

"Well, I got better, but the face still controlled me. I found myself searching the streets for one like it. Somewhere, I was convinced, the real man must exist, and him I must meet. Why, I had no notion:

I only knew that he and I were in some way linked by fate. I frequented places where men congregate in large numbers—political meetings, football matches, the railway stations when the suburban trains pour forth their legions on the City in the morning, and receive them again in the evening. But all in vain. I had never before realized as I then did how many different faces of man there are and how few. For all differ, and yet, classified, they belong to only as many groups as you can count on your hands.

"The search became a mania with me. I neglected everything else. I stood at busy corners watching the crowd until people thought me crazy, and the police began to know me and be suspicious. Women I never glanced at: men, men, men, all the time."

He passed his hand wearily over his brow. "And then," he continued, "at last I saw him. He was in a taxi driving east along Piccadilly. I turned and ran beside it for a little way and then saw an empty one coming. 'Follow that taxi,' I gasped, and leaped in. The driver managed to keep it in sight and it took us to Charing Cross. I rushed on to the platform and found my man with two ladies and a little girl. They were going to France by the 2.20. I hung about to try and get a word with him, but in vain. Other friends had joined the party, and they moved to the train in a solid body.

"I hastily purchased a ticket to Folkestone, hoping that I should catch him on the boat before it sailed; but at Folkestone he got on board before me with

his friends, and they disappeared into a large private saloon, several cabins thrown into one. Evidently he was a man of wealth.

"Again I was foiled; but I determined to cross too, feeling certain that when the voyage had begun he would leave the ladies and come out for a stroll on the deck. I had only just enough for the single fare to Boulogne, but nothing could shake me now. I took up my position opposite the saloon door and waited. After half an hour the door opened and he came out, but with the little girl. My heart beat so that it seemed to shake the boat more than the propeller. There was no mistaking the face — every line was the same. He glanced at me and moved towards the companion-way for the upper deck. It was now or never, I felt.

"'Excuse me,' I stammered, 'but do you mind giving me your card? I have a very important reason for wishing to communicate with you.'

"He seemed to be astonished, as indeed well he might; but he complied. With extreme deliberation he took out his case and handed me his card and hurried on with the little girl. It was clear that he thought me a lunatic and considered it wiser to humour me than not.

"Clutching the card I hurried to a deserted corner of the ship and read it. My eyes dimmed; my head swam; for on it were the words: Mr. Ormond Wall, with an address at Pittsburg, U.S.A. I remember no more until I found myself in a hospital at

Boulogne. There I lay in a broken condition for some weeks, and only a month ago did I return."

He was silent.

We looked at him and at one another and waited. All the other talk of the evening was nothing compared with the story of the little pale man.

"I went back," he resumed after a moment or so, "to Great Ormond Street and set to work to discover all I could about this American in whose life I had so mysteriously intervened. I wrote to Pittsburg; I wrote to American editors; I cultivated the society of Americans in London; but all that I could find out was that he was a millionaire with English parents who had resided in London. But where? To that question I received no answer.

"And so the time went on until yesterday morning. I had gone to bed more than usually tired and slept till late. When I woke the sun was streaming in the room. As I always do, I looked at once at the wall on which the face is to be seen. I rubbed my eyes and sprang up in alarm. It was only faintly visible. Last night it had been as clear as ever — almost I could hear it speak. And now it was but a ghost of itself.

"I got up dazed and dejected and went out. The early editions of the evening papers were already out, and on the contents bill I saw, 'American Millionaire's Motor Accident.' You must all of you have seen it. I bought it and read at once what I knew I should read. Mr. Ormond Wall, the Pittsburg millionaire

and party, motoring from Spezzia to Pisa, had come into collision with a wagon and were overturned; Mr. Wall's condition was critical.

"I went back to my room still dazed, and sat on the bed looking with unseeing eyes at the face on the wall. And even as I looked, suddenly it completely disappeared.

"Later I found that Mr. Wall had succumbed to his injuries at what I take to be that very moment."

Again he was silent.

"Most remarkable," we said; "most extraordinary," and so forth, and we meant it too.

"Yes," said the stranger. "There are three extraordinary, three most remarkable, things about my story. One is that it should be possible for the discoloration in a lodging-house in London not only to form the features of a gentleman in America, but to have this intimate association with his existence. It will take Science some time to explain that. Another is that that gentleman's name should bear any relation to the spot on which his features were being so curiously reproduced by some mysterious agency. Is it not so?"

We agreed with him, and our original discussion on supernatural manifestations set in again with increased excitement, during which the narrator of the amazing experience rose and said good-night. Just as he was at the door, one of the company — I rejoice to think it was Spanton — recalled us to the cause of our excited debate by asking him, before

he left, what he considered the third extraordinary thing in connection with his deeply interesting story. "You said three things, you know," Spanton reminded him.

"Oh, the third thing," he said, as he opened the door, "I was forgetting that. The third extraordinary thing about the story is that I made it up about half an hour ago. Good-night, again."

After coming to our senses we looked round for Rudson-Wayte, who had brought this snake to bite our bosoms, but he too had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH WE LOSE A FEW CENTURIES AND FIND A LIVING-PICTURE BY SIR DAVID WILKIE

THE Director in his search for primitive English music had tidings of two old Morris dancers in an Oxfordshire village, survivals from the past when the whole of that county fostered the art, and he took me to see them. Never have I spent a more curious evening.

We left the train at Bicester late on a golden afternoon, and were driven to a little hamlet a few miles distant where the old fellows lived. They were brothers: one a widower of seventy, still lissom, and the other a bachelor of sixty-seven, bent and stiff; and with them when we arrived was another elderly man, a little their junior, blowing and beating away at his pipe and tabor as though dear life depended upon it.

Unfamiliar music these ancient instruments give forth, and I defy anyone hearing it to keep his feet still. They are not the drum and fife by any means, although those are the nearest things to them to-day, nor are they like the old magic drum and pipes of the "Punch and Judy" man (never to be heard again,

alas, with a beating heart); but something between the two, with a suggestion of rollick or even madness added. I heard the sounds while we were still approaching the cottage and had no notion what they were; and the strangeness of their melody was increased by the player's total disregard of our entry, although it was a tune that might have ended anywhere. The pipe and tabor have now passed into the limbo of musical archaisms, but it was absurd to allow them to do so. There are certain effects on the stage that no other instruments could so well achieve, and their invitation to the dance is in a simpler way not less commanding than Weber's.

The old fellow played both instruments simultaneously; his left hand at once fingering the three holes of the pipe and supporting the string to which the tabor was suspended, while his right held the little stick with which he unceasingly beat it. For the twain are never separated.

Upon his stopping at last — and I for one could have heard him, uninterfering, for hours — we had a little talk as to his repertory and so forth, until, having changed their boots, the venerable capering brethren were ready. The elder one, Eli, was bright of eye and still very light on his feet; but the younger, Jack, creaked a little. Eli had a gentle smile ever on his curved lips, and as he danced his eyes looked into the past; Jack kept a fixed unseeing gaze on the musician. Together, or alone, they went through several of the old favourites — "Shepherds, Hey,"

"Maid of the Mill," "Old Mother Oxford," "Step back," "Lumps of Plum-pudding," "Green Garters"—and it was strange to sit in that little, flagged Oxfordshire kitchen, with its low ceiling and smoky walls, and watch these simple movements and hear those old tunes. More than strange; for as they continued, and the pipe and tabor continued, I became conscious of a new feeling. For the Morris dance is like nothing else. It is as different from the old English dance as that is different from the steps of the *corps de ballet*. It is the simplest thing there is, the most naïve. Or, if you are in that mood, it is the most stupid; jigging rather than dancing, and very monotonous. But after a little while it begins to cast its spell, in which monotony plays no small part, and one comes in time to hope that nothing will ever happen to interrupt it and force one back into real life again.

The feeling became positively uncanny when old Jack, the bent one, jigging alone, still with his eyes fixed on the musician, but seeing nothing nearer than 1870, began to touch his body here and there in the course of the movements of the dance, every touch having a profound mystical meaning, of which he knew nothing, that probably dated from remotest times, when these very steps were part of a religious or ecstatic celebration of fecundity. Odd sight for a party of twentieth century dilettanti in an Oxfordshire kitchen!

The occasion was not only curious but pathetic too;

one saw after a while not these dancers, so old and past the joy of life, but the dancers as once they were, when, forty years ago, they would set out in a team every Whitsuntide, six in all, to dance the Morris in other villages, and sleep in a barn all so jolly, and drink the good ale provided by the farmers, and each strive to be the most agile and untiring for the sake of a pair of pretty Oxfordshire eyes.

Forty years ago!

Asked if there were any others who still remembered the steps, they said no. "We be the last, us be," said Eli, in his soft, melancholy voice. "All the others be dead."

The brothers described, each fortifying the other and helped by the promptings and leading questions of the Director, the ritual of the Morris as they remembered it. A lamb would be led about by a shepherd, and behind this lamb they danced. At night the lamb was killed and the joints distributed. Most was eaten, but portions were buried in the fields. Why, the old men had no notion; they had never heard. But the Director knew, although he did not explain.

For upwards of an hour these energetic enthusiasts continued to dance, sometimes without a hitch, and then again with hesitations and arguments as to the next step or movement. What thoughts were theirs, I wondered. Since he had last danced Eli had married, had had children, had seen his children grow up and his wife die. Yet I am certain that as he skipped

and capered on those flagstones in the cottage where he was born, his personality was that rather of a young man than an old. And then the music stopped and he ceased to wave his handkerchief and spring from foot to foot, and he sank into a chair and the light left his face and wistful old age settled over it again.

I congratulated him on his sprightliness, and again asked his age, to make sure.

"Seventy," he said. "I shall be seventy-one in July if I live. If I live," he added, after a while.

"Of course you'll live," I said. "You're good for many years yet and many more dances."

He shook his head.

That he thinks of his end a good deal, I am sure; but never morbidly, or with any affectation of sadness, but with the peasant's quiet acceptance of the fact. All his life he has been a tiller of the soil: the same soil, year after year, turning it afresh, sowing it afresh, gathering the harvest afresh, and then beginning all over again — the best school for patience and acceptivity.

And so, after some ale had been brought, we said good-night and drove away, for Oxford and London again, or, in other words, for the twentieth century.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH NAOMI COMMUNICATES A TREMENDOUS PIECE OF NEWS, AND "PLACIDA" FIGHTS IT OUT WITH "LAVENDER" AND LOSES

NAOMI was very quiet at breakfast and, I thought, very beautiful. She startled me, afterwards, as I stood at the window, watching the rain, by asking quietly, "Which would you like, Kent, dear, a girl or a boy?"

I had a moment's giddiness, but did not show it.

"I almost said 'Both,'" I replied.

"I shouldn't mind," she said. "But in case I disappoint you to that extent, which do you prefer?"

"I would like it to be what you want," I said. "But little girls are rather nice, and biggish girls are rather nice, and a daughter to walk about with when one is white-haired — but erect, of course — is something to look forward to. But you?"

"Oh yes," said Naomi, "I would like a girl."

"Then let it be a girl," I replied.

How differently things happen in novels and in life. Had I been a husband in a novel or a play I should have been thunderstruck that anything of

this kind could possibly be happening; while my poor wife would have crimsoned and hid her face on my shoulder. As it was, we both laughed a little and I stroked her pretty head; and then she sat down to add up some accounts and I went to the Zoo. But underneath we were as conscious of the epoch-making moment as any of the husbands in the novels who, try as they may, cannot succeed in anticipating these somewhat trite events.

A few days later we began seriously to consider the question of names. I found on a bookstall a little pocket encyclopædia which gave two of its precious pages to columns and columns of girls' names in small print, in alphabetical order. Some of these names I will admit were outside the domain of practical politics. Jezebel, for example. No child of mine shall ever be called Jezebel, nor do I care much for Judith; although Judy I think pretty. But Naomi would have a boy rather than call her daughter Judy. Privately I may say that I believe that Naomi wants a boy; I believe that all women would like their babies to be sons. But she pretends that her wishes coincide with mine, and, after all, a girl is the next thing to a boy.

Beginning at the wrong end, our first duty was to examine the claims of Zoë, but that did not take long. No child of ours, we decided, should have a name that carried a diæresis with it. That is an axiom. Zoë therefore went.

"Zena?" I said.

"Certainly not," replied Naomi.

The only Y's were Yseult and Yvonne, but these were useless, as we intend never to live in Kensington. Winifred we also dismissed and Wilhelmina.

"How about Victoria?" I said.

But Naomi remained firm.

I dwelt fondly on Virginia. Miss Virginia Falconer sounds distinguished.

Naomi, however, was against it.

I like Veronica too, but not so well as Virginia. The other V's were negligible — Vashti and Vesta; but I affected to put in a plea for Volumnia.

"I could never nurse a Volumnia," said Naomi. "It is so immense. It also sounds like a steamer."

"Still," I said, "there ought to be a Volumnia Falconer, just to cheer up the birth announcements in the *Times*. Think of the double portions of samples that you would receive! To call a child Volumnia is as useful as having twins."

"I don't like it; but if you really want the samples you could call the child Volumnia in the *Times* and then change the name. A *Times* announcement is not binding," were Naomi's astonishing words: her first appearance as a profound strategist!

"If you talk like that," I said, "and the child takes after you, we had better call her Portia at once, or Christabel."

And so we explored the alphabet, rejecting name after name for the most curious reasons. This one because Naomi was at school with a girl named like

that whom she did not like; that one because some public *bête noire* had it; a third because it was too Jewish; another because it was too scriptural, and Naomi had herself suffered for that; a fifth because it would not go with Falconer; and many because they smacked of the stage.

In the end we found ourselves with two names about as different as they could be, over the merits of which we were obliged to fight. These were Placida and Lavender. Lavender was Naomi's choice; Placida was mine.

"Placida is charming," Naomi said, "but if names, as they say, have an influence on character, won't she be a little too quiet?"

"Can she be?" I replied.

"Well, it would be dreadful if it meant loss of spirit. Meekness is so unattractive."

"She'd inherit the earth," I said.

"Oh no," exclaimed Naomi, "don't let her do that! I would like Placida," Naomi went on, "if it could dominate her character only in her very early days."

"And nights," I added hastily.

"Yes, and nights. But after that? Should a name be so descriptive? Suppose she became a terrible romp?"

"I hope so," I said. "Then there will be piquancy of contrast added, and she will be the more likely to attract the millionaire whom all good fathers hope to descry on the horizon."

"Don't be foolish," said Naomi. "You will be furious when she falls in love, and unbearable when she is engaged."

"Very well, then," I said; "Lavender. But we can't call her Lavender. It's too artificial. Its special charm is that it's such a beautiful word. We can think of her as Lavender, but call her something else. What shall that be?"

"Nan," said Naomi, by an inspiration; and so it was settled.

CHAPTER XXX

IN WHICH WE JOURNEY TO THE NORTH BY NEFARIOUS MEANS, AND NAOMI AND I STUMBLE UPON A PRECISELY SIMILAR FEELING

NAOMI'S old school friendship with Mrs. Farrar, who is the daughter of the Rector of Winfield, is ripening into a new intimacy, into which I am being drawn. Not unwillingly; for although she is rather a slangy, frivolous young woman, she is very fresh and impulsive and genuine, and I have long given up that wish (with which most of us begin life) that every candidate for friendship should conform to one's own standards.

Farrar, I confess, is not exciting; but it is not unamusing to watch the mental and physical processes of a young man who has been brought up never to know the meaning of hunger or thirst, except as the prelude to their agreeable gratification, or to do a day's work beyond fiddling with a defective motor-engine, or walking miles in pursuit of a rubber-cored ball. He is not offensively selfish in his idleness, and has a ready hand for subscription-hunters. In fact, he is really very generous, although,

of course, not thoughtful enough. He distributes the kind of presents, for example, that cause servants to give notice: silver chafing-dishes, patent foot warmers — things like that. Generosity, however, is far from being all, and indeed it may be and often is merely the selfish man's device to be spared worry. It could not save Farrar from Spanton, who would say that the Farrar lily cannot long continue to toil not, neither to spin, in a community such as ours. Times are changing; and though I doubtless shall see little of the social revolution, for things move slowly in England, it will come.

Something, of course, must be done to make these young people responsible; for nothing does it now. They are anti-social to the roots, if they only knew it. Their one desire is to enjoy themselves, which they do in a curious monotonous way that to the ordinary domesticated observer seems to be singularly like discomfort. Their first essential for enjoyment is to get away from home as much as possible, and to reduce to a minimum the responsibility of home. There are therefore no children, although there is youth, vigour, and wealth. Some day they may settle down and have perhaps two, but preferably one; but not yet. To-day they are too keen on moving about, and Gwendolen is too keen on doing everything that Farrar does. She is, in short, a good fellow; and these female good fellows are becoming a danger to the State.

After much mild opposition on my part, we con-

sented to join the Farrars in a motor trip to Winfield. I did not want to go, for several reasons. I like my hearth; I like my habits; I dislike motor-cars; I dislike strange inn beds. I was not prepared for four or five days' racing through this green England in company so limited in imagination. But when I found that Farrar and his wife always sat in front, I relented a little, for it would mean that Naomi and I had the inside wholly to ourselves. I hazarded the stipulation that we should make it a rule on desirable occasions to offer lifts on the road; but Farrar asked me not to press it. It would not work, he said. And I now agree with him, for, as a matter of fact, you can't do things like that in a motor. Motors refuse to stop quickly enough. There can be only one mind in a motor, and that is the driver's, and the driver's is stunned or dulled by his office. Hence, just as one always overshoots the prettiest cottages and gardens and the most beautiful by-roads, so one has long passed the unhappy footsore pedestrian before the impulse to pick him up can be communicated to the man at the wheel; and of course in a motor there is no going back.

As a matter of fact, we did chance to assist one man in this way, but he came up to us when we were stopping for a sandwich on the roadside. That is to say, he overtook us and caught us off our guard: a tall lean man with a stubble on his chin and an air still slightly rakish in spite of travel-stains and weariness. He asked how far it was to

Birmingham, and told us that he was an actor and had heard of a travelling company with whom, before a long illness, he had been associated, and he was walking to Birmingham hoping it might find room for him.

Gwendolen came inside and the histrion (as I am sure he would love best to be called) rode beside Farrar in silence. But when he said good-bye he wrung my hand under the impression that I was the owner of the car, and drew me aside to mention the fact that the loan of half a crown for two days would be an incalculable boon. Poor fellow, he looked so fragile and empty that I made the sum a good deal larger, and pressed him not to be so hasty in returning it; and he promised he would not.

"I could wish sometimes," he said brokenly, with his hat in his hand, as we parted, "that the Great Prompter would ring down the curtain!"

"Hullo!" said Farrar, as I rejoined them, "been biting your ear, eh? That's what always comes of this lift business. How much did he bite it for?"

"Only half a crown," I said, and spent the next hour wondering why it is that one is so terrified of letting a man of the world think one a human being.

We reached Winfield for lunch in Canon Frome's hospitable rectory, and at tea-time strolled over to see some friends of the Fromes named Harberton, who live in a very charming house amid a thick shrubbery: one of those secure and serene houses that are found only in England, a perfect backwater

in the stream of industry and ambition. Harberton is a man of about my own age, a dilettante with literary tastes and some reputation as the editor of Boswell. His wife is much younger — a beautiful woman with very quick sympathies and understanding. Not particularly clever herself, but stimulating others to their best. She has three children, all girls, and when we arrived the whole family was under a cedar about a tea-table. Some white pigeons fluttered on the roof and a spaniel regained its feet with extreme deliberateness and walked slowly to meet and investigate us. The lawn was like velvet: too soft for any game.

Looking at it all I could not help wondering how my young friend Spanton would snort at it. Nothing but leisure and culture here, he would say. No progress. Dead languages, belles-lettres. Everything that is retrograde.

And yet surely there must be, even in a new England of intense socialistic activity, some oases such as this, where ancient peace reigns and children are being thoughtfully brought up to be old-fashioned — as I am sure these three little girls will be. Let there be here and there tiny spots of ointment among the flies!

Mrs. Harberton is all right, of course: she is a mother, and an influence; but as to how far it would be possible to defend Harberton against the Spantons I cannot say. His class doubtless will be put upon its trial before long, just as the Farrars

will. You may be very charming and distinguished and all that, the Spantons will say, but what are you doing for your country and your kind? You are living on dividends earned by other people's labour. That has got to stop. You have got to disgorge and labour yourself. What will you do? What could Harberton do? What could I do?

It is funny that I should thus bracket myself with Harberton, for that night Naomi told me that he reminded her not a little of me.

"That's odd," I said, "for Mrs. Harberton reminds me rather of you."

CHAPTER XXXI

IN WHICH WE MEET A WARDEN AND HER CHARGES, AND HEAR TWO OR THREE STORIES OF STORMY VOYAGES ON LIFE'S WATERS BEFORE HAVEN WAS REACHED

TWO pretty maids having arrived, one to take away the tea and the other to be with the little girls, Mr. Harberton suggested that we should go and see the Warden. This he said with a slight smile that made the invitation very pleasant, and I joined Mrs. Harberton with thoughts of Trollope in my head and visions of the white-haired president of a college. Judge, then, of my surprise when a little shy woman met us not far from the gate and we were introduced to Miss Mitt, the Warden of the Pink Almshouses. Again I anticipated wrongly, for instead of the rose-tinted building which these words led me to expect, I found a very beautiful edifice in grey stone with a long, warmly-tiled roof, the founder of which was a Mrs. Pink, a friend of Mrs. Harberton.

There are beautiful almshouses all over England, and someone ought to write a book describing them, especially as almshouse architecture is almost the

best indigenous domestic architecture that we have. Such temptations as beset modern architects when they build private houses seem for the most part to be absent when they build almshouses. Another triumph for humility, perhaps. For the time being even the most ambitious designer, remembering the purpose of the building, is forced to be simple.

The most amusing almshouse I know is at Chichester, where, under one great dark red roof with pretty dormers in it, dwell several old ladies, each in her own apartments, like an undergraduate or a nun, with a nurse at one end of the central passage and a chapel at the other. But I like the more usual plan better — the row of tiny domiciles like a terrace for fairy godmothers, the little gardens, the muslin blinds, and all the evidences of security. Such a building was that which a young architect in a soft flannel collar (as I guess) had put up for Mrs. Harberton with Mrs. Pink's legacy.

Mrs. Pink's almshouses are all that she would have desired: a long, low façade with two wings at right angles and a flagged garden in the intervening space. Quite a suggestion of "The Harbour of Refuge," but no harm in that. By using old materials the architect had prevented any appearance of crudity, and creepers were already high on the walls. There are thirteen little houses under this long roof, three in each wing and seven in the main building, of which the Warden's house is the middle one. The twelve old women have to be either spinsters or widows and to be fifty-five

or over, and it makes not the faintest difference whether or not they have ever been in receipt of parish relief. Each has ten shillings a week, light, and coal. On this allowance they find their own meals and dress; but in both respects they are often a little helped out by other friends or their own relations.

That anyone meeting Miss Mitt, in London, say, would guess her to be the Warden of twelve pernickety old women, is unlikely; and this not because London seldom or never estimates provincials at their true worth, but because she was so small and unobtrusive. But in her own abode of authority there was no doubt, for, though still small and unobtrusive, she wore there, on her brow, the sign manual of responsibility and control. I had a long talk with her about her duties and difficulties.

"I love the work," she said, "but it's not too easy. I'm not complaining, you know. I don't think things ought to be easy."

"Why ever not?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, "but I've always had that feeling ever since I was a child."

Of course she had, poor little Nonconformist, or, shall I say, poor little Anglo-Saxon?

"Lotus-eating would give you a terrible stomachache," I said, "wouldn't it?"

And the plucky little creature had the hardihood to reply, "I hope so."

What can you do with people like this? and

England is full of them. Suspicion of happiness is in our blood.

"Tell me about the old pests," I said.

"Oh no, Mr. Falconer," she replied, "they're not old pests. They're dears. Only now and then, as old people will, they have troublesome ways. I really believe that the worst of all is jealousy. It makes it so difficult for me to be quite open, and I hate not to be. If I show a little more attention to one than another I'm sure to hear about it or notice the effects of it."

"Ah, jealousy!" I said. "That's the real blot on mankind. You know the origin of it, of course. The good God first made man, and then, as you remember, He extracted woman from man's side. He was so much occupied in gazing at this new work of His hand, so suddenly thought of and created, that He forgot that the aperture was not closed, and before He could close it a little poisonous reptile had crept in. It has been there ever since, and no human blood is free from it. Look how much of it Cain at once inherited!"

"Oh dear, how terrible!" said Miss Mitt. "And is that really true?" and she clicked her tongue. "Well, there's plenty of it here. I can do with their ordinary tantrums and their ailments and their grumblings: but it is so hard to have to keep away from the nicer ones because the others can't bear it, and to have to do things surreptitiously."

I asked her which were the worse, the single or

the married women. She was forced to give the palm to the single. "I suppose," she said, "it's because the married ones have been married and are therefore — therefore ——" Here she was at a loss.

I helped her out. "—are therefore," I said, "more inured to trouble and vexations."

"Yes," Miss Mitt agreed, "if you don't mind my thinking so."

"Men are a nuisance, aren't they?" I said.

"Oh dear, I didn't mean exactly that. Not exactly," said the little Warden. "What I meant was that married women understand give-and-take better than the others who have lived alone. But you mustn't think that all the single ones are cross, or all the widows are always good tempered. It isn't so. This one, for example" — and she knocked at a door — "is the sweetest spinster you could wish to meet. Her name is Selina Still. Isn't that pretty?"

Miss Still let us in — a little grey woman. Her room was a marvel of radiant precision. "Mr. Falconer has come from London all the way in a motor-car," said Miss Mitt.

"It's very wonderful," said the little grey woman. "But I should be frightened to go in one;" and indeed, how could a Selina Still be in a motor-car? It would be a sin against Nature.

The others now joined us, and Farrar laughed at the notion of fear. "What about flying, then?" he asked.

"Oh," said Miss Still very solemnly, "I think this flying's dreadful, and I don't believe it's going to last.

For I can't help feeling there's One above Who won't much longer brook those things getting so near Him."

Miss Still expressed a wish to see London again, but did not expect to. She was last there in 1860, when she was a lady's maid. Her two most prized recollections were the Crystal Palace and Spurgeon's preaching.

Next to Selina Still lived Gipsy Woods, who must in her long-ago youth have been a beauty. Her mother had named her Gipsy for her black eyes. She was now nearing eighty, and was very rheumatic. She had married a gentleman — that is to say, one who would walk about as if he had money in his pockets and do no work, while she was toiling day and night bringing up eleven children. For her belief was that so long as you kept a roof over your head nothing else matters, and that is what she always told the children. She had twins when she was fifty-one, and brought them up too! Her husband disappeared, and most of the children dropped away, and a few years ago she had to go into hospital because her legs were so bad; and when she came out the people in the house where she had a room had vanished with all her few things, and had it not been for these almshouses she would be in the union.

Quite a typical story, this, not only as illustrating the wife's dogged courage and the husband's unthrift, but also the uselessness of so many children. It would seem indeed to be the exception rather than the rule to find sons and daughters of the poor grow-

ing up to help their parents, poverty being so hard put to it to provide any spring-board from which to take off for a better position.

Apropos of twins, another of the old ladies who was not otherwise interesting, a mournful body in black, with pink cotton wool in her ears which gave her head the appearance, seen hurriedly, of being hollow, boasted of having had "two couple of twins twice." This works out, if we are exact in the use of the word twin, to eight at a birth or sixteen in all. But she meant only that she had had four altogether. I congratulated her on her achievement, but she was apathetic about it. "Mrs. Nottidge," she said, "the wife of the landlord of the 'Jolly Bricklayers,' had triplets and got the Queen's bounty." The heroine of the twins, the Warden told us, liked to keep a bottle of gin, which was always referred to tactfully as medicine. It was supplied to her by a neighbouring lady who once sent a pound of tea in the same basket, and the gin bottle breaking, the tea was saturated. An ordinary person would merely have deplored a loss; but this recipient was more resourceful. She dried the tea in the oven and found it vastly improved for its drenching. That old women like a drop of something strong in the teacup, we all know; but here is possibly an idea for the tea trade which might enormously increase its profits. When consuming her gin in a more normal manner, Miss Mitt told us, the old lady always stirred it with a sprig of rue. It made it "healthier."

At No. 8 was Martha Drax. Mrs. Drax was now nearing seventy, and all the time that she could spare from her household duties she devoted to meditating upon a letter to the King. Not that she was exactly mad — although this occupation might suggest it — but a little enfeebled in intellect, as indeed all poor old women have every right to be, considering what most of them go through in their long lives of penury and struggle; but in her case there was more than enough reason. Martha's story was this:

As a girl in service she had become engaged to the son of the local baker. All had gone well until they took a day's holiday to visit a seaside resort, where he became wholly and dangerously intoxicated, and so terrified her that she broke off the match. He did all he could to win her again, but in vain; and after some years he married another girl from the same place, a big, strong creature who was cook to the doctor. They lived in the village, where the man worked as a gardener and attended the same chapel as Martha, who also had remained there, although only too eager to get away, tethered to it by an epileptic brother and bedridden mother, on whom she had to wait. At last the dislike of seeing the man and his wife together so told upon her that she left chapel and began to go to church; the man himself she avoided, exchanging the time of day with him when they met, but no more, and though not jealous of his wife, she intensely resented her.

So things went on for sixteen years, when she was

at last able to leave the village and take service in a neighbouring town, and cease to be reminded of the man's existence.

One evening, two years after, there was a knock at the back door, and when she went to it there he was. His wife had been dead six months; he was very lonely and unhappy; he had never really loved anyone but Martha, and would she marry him now? Partly from the suddenness of the shock; partly from a feeling that here was the finger of Fate; not a little from pleasurable excitement and pride to think of the power she exerted; and partly, in her own words, because "it seemed more natural like to die a married woman," she consented. "The thought," to quote her again, "of his coming back after all those years and saying he had never wanted anybody else took my breath away, and made it impossible to say no."

Anyway, they were married, only for her at once to discover that her husband was a secret drinker of the worst kind, and had been so for years. He made no disguise of it to her, and even told her that his first wife had helped to keep it dark by locking him in the house till the orgy was over and then thrashing him with his own leather belt — a feat to which Martha refers in envious admiration, for she is a little meek woman. She had no power to cope with the situation, and her husband became worse. The secret was a secret no longer; he lost his work, and, during a period of distress, died of pneumonia three years after his second marriage.

Martha, who was now a woman of over fifty, went back to service and became housekeeper to a country clergyman, an old bachelor, where for two weeks she was in transports of delight, only to be plunged in misery and anxiety by the discovery that her new master also was a drunkard, and that the real reason of her engagement to him was to assist in keeping this fact from the parish. This, with the assistance of a curate, she did her best to accomplish; the poor old gentleman during his periodical outbreaks was confined as much as possible to one room. Again and again she made up her mind to run away, but she was restrained, partly by pity for her employer, who, when not in his cups, was the sweetest of characters, and partly from the knowledge that her age was a bad one for re-engagement. The clergyman, who knew all about his unfortunate malady, further enlisted her sympathies by telling her that it was after his wife's death that he had begun to give way.

For seven years the deception was maintained, when one day the scandal could be hidden no longer; the parish rose, the Bishop interfered, and the unhappy invalid was removed to closer restraint. Martha for a while lived on her savings, such as they were, and assistance from the clergyman's friends, who knew how hard she had toiled to preserve his good name, and then Mrs. Pink's almshouses being set up in her neighbourhood, she entered that haven, and is now in security for the rest of her days.

She is perfectly sane except for the obsession that it is her duty to write to the King, calling upon him to prohibit the sale of alcohol anywhere in England, and so save millions of homes. But although she is convinced that a letter sent to the King always gets to him and cannot fail of its purpose, the missive has never gone, for the simple reason that she cannot compose it to her satisfaction, being too little of a scholar, and she will not allow anyone else to write it for her. It is because of vicarious assistance in such matters that similar letters have not had the desired effect, and she will not prejudice her case in that way. Such is the life story of Martha Drax at No. 8.

I came away, again wondering what Spanton would say of all this serenity and comfort. Foolish sentimentalism, probably. Wanton and anti-social waste of money to cosset these old, unproductive women. Let the back-numbers either perish or look after themselves. And so on. But to talk like that is to disregard human nature and the kindlier feelings. A state that deliberately refused the responsibilities of protecting and caring for its old might achieve miracles of scientific housing, profit-sharing, and so forth; but it would be fossilized at the core. Sentiment and emotion cannot be left out.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN WHICH I AT LAST BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH THE TOP-FLOOR-FRONT, AND HEAR HIS ROMANTIC STORY

IT was just as I was putting away my book, quite late, that Miss Laura knocked at the door to say that Mr. Carstairs, the gentleman on the top floor, who had been ill for some days, had asked if I would be so good as to pay him a short visit. This seemed to me odd, for beyond exchanging "good morning" now and then, we had never spoken; but it was not a request that I could disregard, and up I went.

The old gentleman was in bed, and as he lay there, gaunt and grey, with his hollow cheeks and bright eyes and pointed beard, he was like nothing in the world but Don Quixote. With a courteous movement he motioned me to a chair, and then thanked me for having compassion on a stranger's whim.

For a while after this there was silence, and I had an opportunity of noticing how bare was his room of all but necessities, although those seemed of the best. There were no pictures.

"I asked you to come," Mr. Carstairs began, "because I had a bad night last night and I have had

a bad day. This you may think but a poor reason," he continued, in his quiet, cultured voice, smiling faintly, "and to you, who are well and strong, it is inadequate. But to me, who am dying, it is justification for any eccentricity. I liked you directly I saw you, and it pains me to think that I have taken no steps to cultivate the acquaintance of yourself and your wife; but I have long got out of the way of making overtures of friendship, and to occupy rooms in the same house is not one of the best passports to a good understanding."

He lay back exhausted and began to cough. I looked among the bottles for a lenitive and found only an empty one. Asking him if there was another, I understood him to say it was in the cupboard by the window; and to this I hurried. But no sooner was my hand on the handle than his face underwent a terrifying transformation, and he half-sprang from bed crying, "Not there! Not there!"

I came hurriedly from the door, and he quieted down and directed me to a cupboard on the other side. Now what Bluebeard's closet was this? I wondered (with Mrs. Wiles). I was soon to know.

"I throw myself on your good nature," he resumed, "because I am *in extremis* and have no friend within call. It is extremely improbable that I shall get well from this attack. You see, for one thing I am a good age, and for another I have very little to live for, and therefore am not likely to make a fight of it."

I murmured the usual things.

"No," he said, "there's very little in it. If I recover it is only for a brief while, with impaired strength. If I were younger and happier even that would be worth having; but really one may as well die to-day as to-morrow. It's got to be."

This is a form of fatalism with which I am as fit to grapple as a seamstress with a cuttlefish, so I said nothing.

"Your kindness in coming up," he continued, "leads me to ask you to be kinder still and administer my effects. They are few enough. I want everything to go to the National Art Collections Fund. It sounds simple, but there is this complication, that the name by which I am known is not my real name; and my real name, although it is bound to come out, I want to be still suppressed in connection with myself. I die as John Carstairs."

My face, no doubt, indicated some perplexity, for he went on.

"You will understand only if I tell you the whole story; but first I must confess that I am one of the most notorious of living thieves — perhaps almost the most famous of all, in this country — who have never been found out. When I die the secret must of necessity be in part discovered. I look to you to help me so that my name and the theft are kept distinct."

I said nothing for a little while, but merely pondered on the accidents of life in general, and in particular that accident which had led me to 7 Primrose Terrace, Regent's Park, to a respectable-looking house kept

by refined twins, in which I was to live beneath a dying brigand and be forced into the position of his executor.

"Does the prospect alarm you?" he asked.

"Well," I said, "to be frank, it is not what I should have asked for. But," I added hastily, "you may continue your instructions: that is, if you are really certain that there is no one but myself to help you. Have you no lawyer?"

"A lawyer witnessed my will quite recently," he said. "It is in order. You will perhaps go to him for its execution."

"And what about your next-door neighbour, Spanton?" I said.

He smiled grimly.

"Then Lacey, the best of men and the most ingenious and helpful?"

"Yes," he said, "I thought of Lacey. But he has too much to do; and I was afraid he might be too clever. He is impulsive. This topic is so delicate that impulse might ruin it. So," he smiled humorously, "I had your name put in the document."

"Kismet," I replied; but Heaven knows I wished myself downstairs with my door carefully locked. I neither wanted to hear his story nor administer his ill-gotten estate. The whole thing was absurd. The chance of passing fellow-lodgers on the stairs and having the misfortune to appear benevolent and virtuous to their defective vision ought not to be permitted to lead to such embroilments as this. But I have ever

been weak and acquiescent; and when I looked at his melancholy, wasted features, what else could I do? A dying Don Quixote — who would not be foolish for him?

When I agreed he gave a great sigh of relief — probably at once the most tragic and satisfactory sound I shall ever hear — and held out his long, bony hand.

"You can take it without fear," he said, smiling again; "when I said I was a thief I did not say all. There is such a thing as stealing your own. But listen. The story briefly is this: I was a well-to-do business man, unmarried and not very sociable. That was twenty and more years ago. Then a serious crisis came in my life of which I need say nothing, and I decided suddenly to leave civilization completely and begin all over afresh where the conditions were simpler. There was no disgraceful element in the matter. An event occurred which led to complete disillusionment setting in; I developed acute misanthropy and realized that England and I were incompatible. That is all. Many men — and perhaps many women — must have been through a similar experience; but not all are as free as I was to act.

"I laid my plans very carefully. I converted a sufficient amount of stock into cash; I made my will, leaving everything to the establishment of a certain kind of night refuge in London for the homeless, wherever they were most needed; and

then I disappeared. This was not difficult. I took a passage to America. Between Liverpool and Queenstown I shaved off my long beard and moustache and changed my clothes. At Queenstown I left my stateroom, after depositing a last letter on the table, and went ashore among a crowd of other passengers. There I took train at once and was soon in London again, where I shipped for Australia and the South Seas. Meanwhile, that had happened on the steamer which I had foreseen. My stateroom was not opened until some hours after the vessel was on her way to America, and the contents of the letter there led people to assume that I had jumped overboard. I was therefore dead. A sufficient time having elapsed, the courts officially presumed my death, my estate was wound up, and I was a thing of the past. Any reasonably careful man can disappear still, in spite of Marconi and all the other modern obstacles, provided he has not committed a crime. And it was easier then."

"Were the night refuges built?" I asked.

"Oh yes," he said. "I have slept in one. A most curious experience.

"Arrived in Sydney I opened a banking account in my new name, made some investments, and passed on to the South Seas, where, for fifteen years, I lived a calm life, succeeding commercially, as I was bound to do, and happier perhaps than not, although happiness was never in my grasp, nor could it be. Then gradually the desire once more to be in London

became very powerful; while an absolute mania seized me again to see pictures. Particularly one picture. That it would be safe, I felt sure, for I was much changed and had had few intimate friends at any time."

He paused, tired with his effort, and lay still.

"I must tell you," he continued, "that I had been not only a great lover of pictures wherever they were to be seen, but a collector too. At the time of my disappearance I had one of the best small private collections in the country. Such, however, had been my disgust with life that it included these pictures too, and in my rage and haste to have broken with everything, I was ready to break with them as well, and my will gave instructions for all my pictures to be sold save one little jewel of paint, the very gem of the collection — a small Madonna which has been attributed to Verrocchio — and this I left to the National Gallery. It was this picture that I felt I must at any risk again see. I therefore sold my South Sea business, wound up my affairs, and returned to London, again a rich man, finding a lodging in this house. That was seven years ago.

"So far all is well. Now comes the criminal part of the story. No sooner did I see my little Verrocchio on its easel in the National Gallery — in the most honoured place — than I realized that I could not live without it. I had not known what a spell I was under or I would have stayed away. It had always been in my living-room in my old life, and I found

that I belonged to it still. I used to go day after day to Trafalgar Square to worship it — nothing less. I became known to the attendants. After closing hours I would plot how to get possession of it again. I could not go to the Director and say who I was and insist on a return of the picture until I died in earnest. For one thing he would not have believed me, and to make him believe me would have meant an endless and merciless raking up of the past: more than that, a return to my old identity, which was unbearable: men shaking hands with me, newspaper comment, and all the rest of it. Again, there was the risk that he might think me a dangerous lunatic and forbid me the Gallery. Think of that!

"I had therefore to consider how to get the picture secretly, and at last I managed it — at noon, of course, for that is the true time for successful theft, and by means of a big cloak on copying day. I had carefully noted the times when vigilance was relaxed, and waited my chance. It came; I removed the picture, passed quietly into the street, and found my way here unobserved."

He paused again. "You will, of course, remember the incident," he went on. "The world rang with it. 'Theft of the famous Verrocchio.' I had very little fear of being discovered and, naturally, no remorse; but I must admit to a little self-consciousness on my next visit to Trafalgar Square — for, of course, I was not so foolish as to discontinue my old habits. But I was cunning. I went to the Director and

offered to give £5000 as a reward for the detection of the thief — on the condition that the donor's name was not published. I was able also to discuss the theft with the officials quite calmly. My one regret was that the custodian of the room in which my little masterpiece was kept was discharged, but I have seen to it, always anonymously, that he has not lost financially.

"I now began to be almost happy. I had my picture and, the National Gallery being negligible, I was again able to look in at Christie's whenever I wished and mix again in this ocean we call London. I bought no more; I had the best; but I saw everything that was good, and became an amateur expert at the service of any of my dealer acquaintances.

My one disappointment was that being so exceptional a picture thief I was not and am not able to enter into the feelings of the more typical kind. For naturally the one thing above all others that I want to know is who took the Louvre Leonardo, and why, and where it is. The motive could not have been identical with mine, but it might be akin. But this I shall never know, because I am going to die."

"Not yet," I said, "not yet."

"Yes," he replied. "And I must waste no more time. I am very weak. What I want you to do is to get this picture back into the possession of the National Gallery without anyone suspecting my connection with it. That is all. The ordinary execution of my will you and the lawyer can

manage without the faintest difficulty, and I have left you plenty for such expense and trouble as you are put to. But the restitution of this picture I count on you to make alone. You will do it?"

I shook his hand. "I will do everything possible to preserve secrecy," I said.

"There is no hurry," he replied. "Take your time. Keep it in your room in a parcel until you are ready. Only the suspected are suspected in this world, and you and I are equally remote from their thoughts."

He lay still again.

"But where," I asked, after a while, "is the picture?"

"In there," he said, pointing to the door to which I had wrongly gone for the cough mixture. "Go in. No one has seen it here but myself."

I opened the door and found myself in a little room lighted by one window. Opposite this on the wall was a curtain.

"Turn on the light," he said, "and draw back the curtain."

I did so, and beheld one of the most exquisite paintings I ever saw — the head of a girl, sweet, wistful, understanding, and gay. Not quite a Madonna; no mother; but the very personification of youthful joy, sympathy, and loveliness. I knew too little of painting to express an opinion as to the authenticity, and Verrocchio, I am told, although he was the master of Leonardo and Perugino and Lorenzo di Credi, has left almost nothing authentically from his own brush; but there is a candour and

charm in the treatment, and transparency in the colours, which are like nothing that I know except the National Gallery picture attributed to this master's school.

"Bring it to me, please," said Carstairs from his bed, and I carried it in and held it for him.

"No one has ever seen it but myself — and now you — since it left the Gallery four years ago," he said. "Mrs. Wiles has done her best to get into that room, but in vain. I suppose everyone who steals a picture or becomes the owner of a stolen picture has similar difficulties. Perhaps the safer way would be to have another canvas or panel over the stolen one, in the same frame, to slide aside when one is alone; but that would mean taking a workman more or less into one's confidence, and no wise thief does that.

"Put it back, put it back," he cried suddenly, as he fell on his pillow unconscious.

I did so at once, put the key of the cupboard door in my pocket, and telephoned for the doctor.

Carstairs died that night.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN WHICH I BECOME THE VERY OPPOSITE OF A THIEF, YET FEEL ALL A THIEF'S SENSE OF GUILT

AFTER visiting Naomi to tell her of the state of things upstairs, I returned to Mr. Carstairs' room and awaited the doctor. The sick man did not recover consciousness. It was then necessary to inform the Misses Packer and telephone to the undertaker, and this I agreed to do. Before, however, I descended to the basement with my grim message, I secured some paper and string, made a parcel of the little Verrocchio, and placed it on a shelf in my room. Having agreed to carry out this peculiar and delicate commission, I meant to do it thoroughly.

Miss Laura and Miss Emma took the demise of Mr. Carstairs as a personal affront. I gathered that he had never been a favourite with them, although his money was good and he gave no trouble; but to die under their roof they held to be an action not only ungentlemanly but dishonest.

"Brings such a bad name on a house to have anyone die in it," said Miss Laura. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if Mr. Spanton were to leave. Of course with you, sir, it's different, you not being acquainted with the deceased, and two floors away, whereas Mr. Spanton's so close."

Having had another look at the mysterious cupboard, I thought it best to obtain the services of a lawyer before proceeding further; and together we looked for the will. It was easily found, and on reading it I discovered that the old fellow had truly inserted my name as his executor with a firm hand some days before he asked me: not a bad divination of my besetting complaisance! I discovered also something that caused the Misses Packer not only to change their tone with regard to the deceased but send them cheerfully to his funeral in new and becoming mourning, for he left them each fifty pounds in recognition of their unremitting kindness, and asked to be allowed to pay for the new papering and whitewashing of his rooms. To Mrs. Wiles he left ten pounds, and to his executor, "to compensate him for any unusual worry, vexation, and expense to which he may be put," five hundred pounds — an amount which seemed to perplex the lawyer not a little. "You're very lucky, my dear sir," he said. "Why, there's nothing to do!" If the Law only knew!

We buried John Carstairs at Kensal Green, and I ordered the stonecutter to place on his tombstone

the words, from the Song of Solomon, "O thou fairest among women," and to this hour the honest fellow thinks I am mad.

These things being accomplished, I was free to bend my mind to the question of the restitution of the little Verrocchio; and this I had to work out absolutely alone. I could not even tell Naomi, even under that elastic understanding which is held to entitle married people to share secrets entrusted to either, for although I am no believer in the old saying that no woman can keep a secret, or, rather, do not believe that a woman is less of an oyster in these matters than a man, yet I did not wish to burden her with so good a forbidden mystery. I do not say she would have been embarrassed to retain it; but even the most cautious of us have a way now and then of dressing up a friend's confidence vaguely, with several removes, and so forth, which, though safe enough in some companies, might give everything away to a clever listener who was acquainted with one's circle. Anyway I did not tell her.

The only real temptation which I had to break the dead man's injunction, was to tell Lacey. Lacey would not only have been useful, but he would have so enjoyed it. I did not even dare to skirt the subject with him, to get the benefit of his improvisations. Furley, too, what would he not have given to be in a position to "film" me (as he calls it) with the famous picture under my arm on the errand of restitution!

I began—as I guess most criminals do, and I was a kind of inverted criminal with all a criminal's desire for secrecy—by inventing elaborate schemes, the cleverest things you ever heard of. But I gave them all up in favour of the most obvious commonplace simplicity. Having decided what to do, I waited three months and then did it. The delay was due to the fear that if I acted at once, two and two might easily be put together, since Carstairs had left all his money—no inconsiderable sum—to the National Art Collections Fund, and a comparison of dates might lead to investigation, and an interview with the Misses Packer or Mrs. Wiles might educe the fact of the locked cupboard, and then perhaps there would be a cross-examination of myself, from which the truth would probably emerge. At least, so I feared.

I therefore allowed the parcel to remain among my papers—every night waking up convinced the house was on fire, and never leaving it without expecting to find only ashes on my return—and at the end of three months I chose a moment when everyone was out, and in broad day conveyed the parcel to the cloak-room of that very centre of bustle and incuriosity, the Piccadilly Circus Tube station, where in the thick of passengers and chorus girls, I deposited it and paid my twopence. The boy gave me my ticket without lifting his eyes, and I again merged with the crowd. I had already printed on a piece of

plain paper an intimation that if the Director of the National Gallery would send for the parcel concerned, he would not regret the deed, and this I enclosed with the ticket in an envelope, and dropped it into the post.

I could not send the picture direct, because that would have meant either an intermediary or myself carrying it. I could not send the note by express, because that would have meant a visit to the post office at a given registered time. Hence the pillar box, which, though safe, gave me one further anxiety — fear lest the Piccadilly Circus station should also be consumed by fire in the night; but this very unlikely contingency did not keep me awake, for, as Trist says, "The art of life is to take all reasonable precautions and then throw the responsibility on the shoulders of Fate."

The next day nothing happened, but *The Times* of the morning after had the whole glorious story. The lines

"RECOVERY OF A LOST MASTERPIECE.
THE STOLEN VERROCCHIO."

caught my eye at once, and I settled down to the perusal of what still is to me the most amusing piece of literature in the language.

"Listen," I said to Naomi, "here's something interesting," and I read as follows:

"'It will be remembered that some four years ago

the world was startled by the news that the portrait of an unknown woman, attributed to Verrocchio, the master of Leonardo da Vinci, had disappeared from the National Gallery. The theft was contrived in full daylight, probably by a clever gang whose plans had long been maturing, and although Scotland Yard exerted every effort, no trace of the miscreant was found. Yesterday the Director received, by the first post, a letter in a disguised hand enclosing a ticket for the cloak-room at Piccadilly Circus station on the Hammersmith-Finsbury Park Railway, and the parcel when opened was found to contain the missing picture. As to who brought the parcel in, the cloak-room attendant has no knowledge; he is too busy, he says, to take particular notice of people, but he fancies it was an elderly woman.

"'The picture has been subjected to the most careful scrutiny, and is found to be in perfect condition, and any question of its being a copy may be set aside. The nation is to be congratulated on the recovery of such a treasure. No doubt certain lines of investigation will be followed, but it is not likely that the Trustees will wish to devote any large portion of their very exiguous income to the inquiry, which after all could afford only a certain sentimental satisfaction. We may take it that the restitution sufficiently indicates the remorse of the thief, and let the question of punishment go.

"'The picture, we may add, came into the possession of the nation in 1888, the bequest of a wealthy

merchant and connoisseur named James Murchison, who committed suicide on a voyage to America very shortly after leaving Queenstown. This is the same James Murchison who founded and endowed the Murchison night refuges all over London.'"

I need hardly add that there followed a short article proving that whoever painted the picture it was most certainly not Verrocchio.

"What a strange thing!" said Naomi. "How did you say the picture was returned?"

"Someone seems to have left it at a Tube cloak-room," I replied, "and sent the Director the ticket."

"That was very clever," Naomi said. "I wonder how you would set about it if you had to restore a stolen picture. Not like that, I feel certain. You'd do something at once more clever and less clever."

"Yes," I said.

"I should like to see the picture so much," Naomi continued. "Do you think it is on view?"

"Sure to be," I said.

"Then let's look in this morning, shall we?"

I was only too willing, and together we stood before the little Verrocchio in its new position, screwed to the wall, with a custodian on either side. Never have I been so glad to see any picture in its right place.

"Why do you sigh like that?" Naomi asked.

"It's so satisfying," I said, but I did not mean quite what she thought.

And so ended not only my first, and I hope last, participation in the higher crime, but also my first, and I hope last, deception of Naomi.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN WHICH I BRING TOGETHER THREE MEN WHO WERE DUE TO MEET, AND A NOVEL AND BENEFICIAL SCHEME IS DECIDED UPON

HEAVEN, I am glad to say, has been pleased to remove Mr. Wiles's adopted daughter from this transitory sphere. She was sickly when she came, and she never rallied, in spite of the most assiduous care on his part, in which he was more or less assisted by a loyal wife.

"Wiles does nothing but mope," Mrs. Wiles told Naomi. "At first, after he found it was no good and the creature was bound to die, he was a little excited and above himself with a scheme he had for getting it Christian burial. I don't know what's come over the man — he never used to have such ideas — but he actually thought of trying to smuggle it into a cemetery as though it was a real child. Went about peering in undertakers' windows and wondering which looked most like helping him. But I put a stop to all that. It wasn't fair to the real people buried there, I said. A pretty thing to pay money for a nice grave or comfortable family vault, and then

have a heathen ape laid near you! Wiles came round to my way of thinking, but he's never recovered his spirits. In the end, he paid good money to have it buried in the dogs' cemetery in the Bayswater Road, and he let me have the scullery new whitewashed without saying a word. If he doesn't get something to do soon I don't know what will happen. But I'm afraid of the drink and the Stock Exchange, both, for he's begun to be interested in tin mines and things like that. If only Mr. Falconer could find him an occupation!"

The good woman's concern about her husband had long made me want to help, and after Mrs. Duckie's statement that the head waiter of the "Golden Horn" had saved enough to start an eating-house of his own, the finger of Providence seemed to be in it, pointing directly at the homely features of Mordecai Wiles, late of the New Ape House.

It is amusing to be able to help a little, but a mistake to congratulate oneself upon the feat. For two reasons, of which one is that one is only an instrument of fate or chance, and the other that most deeds which at first wear the guise of assistance have a way of turning into mischief. The Spaniards, whose proverbs are the best, say that he who would tell the truth should have one foot in the stirrup; and similarly I would advise most self-conscious benefactors of their neighbours to be all ready to run. For otherwise they are in danger of the wrong kind of thanks.

In the present case, however, no harm has yet come to me. The victims of my experiment in busybodydom — or helpfulness, if you like — are not only Mr. Wiles and Mr. Duckie, but (such strange bedfellows can an active altruist bring together) Mr. Lacey. Mr. Duckie for the reasons given; Mr. Wiles also for the reasons given; and Mr. Lacey, because he had told me of his wonderful chop-house scheme. It was a simple duty to unite them; and we met at Mr. Wiles's for the purpose — the time and the place and the interested ones all together.

The weight of the interview fell upon Mr. Lacey, but he enjoyed it. He had to convince Mr. Wiles that there was money in an eating-house at all; and Mr. Duckie, that to limit the food so severely was practicable; and both, that (as I had told them, but men are stubbornly sceptical in such matters) he was an enthusiast and not a company promoter. One can so easily be misunderstood on this point.

He outlined his scheme, I must admit, with a persuasiveness that no company promoter could exceed, and a poor observer might easily have confused him with that *bête noire;* but neither of his hearers kindled perceptibly. Mr. Wiles has had so many affable gentlemen endeavouring, as Farrar's phrase has it, to bite his ear, that he has come to adopt an apathetic mien as second nature; while Mr. Duckie was obviously pained and startled by the revolutionary character of Mr. Lacey's proposal.

"Hot chops, of course, gentlemen like," said Mr. Duckie, "but not for ever. Cold chops I've never heard of. That is to say, chops cold on purpose."

Mr. Lacey admitted that it was an experiment. Possibly there might not be many customers who would come every day, but there ought to be enough regular customers for every other day, and plenty of strangers in a hurry, always. It would be, frankly, a house for hasty lunches. That would be stated. There should be no disguise about it; the outside would convey the intimation that within you could have a cold chop and salad in one minute, or a hot chop and hot buttered toast in ten minutes, and nothing else. "This world," said Mr. Lacey, "would be a vastly easier place if everyone announced his business in plain language. There's no diplomacy like frankness."

The idea was a novel one to Mr. Duckie, who had served for so many years in a restaurant where the bill of fare spelt new potatoes and new peas in capital letters right into August, and prefixed the word fresh to its coffee all the year round.

"People don't like to be told that they can't get nothing else," he said. "The words are not hospitable, if I may say so."

Mr. Lacey pointed out that in the long run the plain dealer won. That is, if his quality was equal to his candour.

Mr. Duckie, however, was a very old dog to learn such unwonted tricks.

"But what about the people who want roast beef?" he asked at length.

"They must go elsewhere," said Mr. Lacey. "We have nothing for them."

"Yes," said Mr. Duckie, "but roast beef's such a popular dish."

"It can't be helped," said Mr. Lacey. "We must specialize."

"I see that," said Mr. Duckie, "but wouldn't it be better to specialize in beef rather than mutton? Gentlemen are so partial to beef. Hot beef, cabbage, and potatoes, or cold beef and salad."

Mr. Lacey pointed out the difference between the two schemes. "If you want beef and vegetables you want an oven and a totally different arrangement of kitchens. The difficulty about potatoes is, they are never hot; cabbage is not always in season; and joints of beef mean a certain amount of waste. Chops and toast can be cooked at the grill, and there is no waste. The place would need plenty of grill accommodation and two or three of the best grillers to be obtained. Also the best chops, butter, and salad oil. Could anything be simpler? The salad oil should come from Italy direct; the house should become famous for it. Tarragon vinegar too — very little dearer than the other and much more memorable."

What a wonderful man, I thought, as he went on, kindling as he spoke, and thinking as he spoke, for he is a born improviser; business men in every walk of life ought to pay him ten guineas an hour just to

make him talk on their own affairs. But business men have always a horror of men with ideas.

Mr. Duckie, I noticed, began to kindle too, but very cautiously. He still had beef on his mind.

"Very true," he said; "but what I mean about roast beef is, that gentlemen seem to expect it. When they're in a hurry they always ask if there's any cold beef."

Mr. Lacey told him again about the big notice outside the chop-house. No one could come in under false pretences.

"But, sir," said Mr. Duckie, "you don't know them. It doesn't matter what you say outside, they'll come in and ask for roast beef. People who're hungry have no reason."

"Very well, then, let them ask; they won't get it," said Mr. Lacey.

"But it's such a mistake in a restaurant not to have what people want," said Mr. Duckie.

Poor Lacey, his quick mind was in despair.

I relieved his agony by asking Mr. Wiles how it all struck him.

"I think it is a good scheme," he said. "I believe in finding a good food and sticking to it. That's what we do with our apes, and after all they're not so wonderfully different from city men. We find what suits them best and keep them on it, with a grape or two or slice of apple when they've done a trick, of course. I'm all for cold mutton myself. It's nourishing and it's clean. You can cut it with a pocket

knife, like whittling a stick, and eat it all. But what I've been wondering is, what about drink?"

"Beer," said Mr. Lacey, "and whisky and soda, and coffee. Nothing else. But the best of each."

Mr. Duckie had been very thoughtful. "Supposing," he said, at last, "we were to have three beef days a week and three mutton?"

Mr. Lacey would not hear of it. "But," he said, "look here. This is what I'll do. The scheme's mine, and if you take it up I'll help you with advice about a site and furnishing and so forth, and you shall give me ten per cent. of the profits after each of you has drawn ten per cent., and nothing if you don't draw that. That's all I ask, and I ask that only if you stick to my idea. But if you decide to do something else, then I make you a present of the whole thing and retire at once. It interests me only as a whole."

Mr. Duckie admitted that this was more than fair, and looked at Mr. Wiles.

Mr. Wiles said that for his part he would go into it and find capital to run it for three years at a reasonable loss, with Mr. Duckie as manager and partner, on a definite understanding — but only if I approved and Mr. Lacey had control. "But," he said, "of course I must ask my wife's opinion," and Mrs. Wiles was called in.

The good woman, after asking my views and finding that I supported the scheme, pronounced in its favour, speaking both as a cook and a speculator.

"And all I can say," she ended, "is, that I hope you'll arrange to keep Wiles busy. For I'm tired of him mooning about the house. And now, sir, if you've finished your talk, I wish you'd come and see my Annie."

She drew me from the room, and with her finger on her lips and tiptoeing along, led me to a bedroom, where, in a cot, I saw a little girl asleep.

"That's our Annie," she said proudly. "She only came to-day. I want Mrs. Falconer to see her to-morrow, if she will, because, of course, Annie was her idea."

Lenient as thoughts of Lavender had made me to all small creatures, I cannot say that I viewed Annie with any active satisfaction, she was so poor and stunted a little Cockney. But, of course, it is best that the good woman should lavish herself on a weakling than on a robust child. The robust grow up anyway, but the others want attention. I asked Annie's history.

"It's very sad," said Mrs. Wiles. "She is an only child, and the mother and father died within a few days of each other. The mother died of pneumonia, which in a kind of way gives Wiles a special interest in Annie, he having seen so much of it; while the father was knocked down and killed by a motor-bus only last week. So the child was taken to the St. Pancras Workhouse, and we heard of it through one of Wiles's friends, and applied for her, and here she is. But I shall never think quite the same about

motor-buses any more. Talk about blessings in disguise — I mean, of course, to Wiles and me; but what a disguise!"

Upon rejoining the others, Lacey and I came away, leaving Mr. Duckie as the Wiles's guest for supper. The last words I heard him say were to his hostess, to the effect that, for some reason or other, gentlemen seemed to like beef best.

CHAPTER XXXV

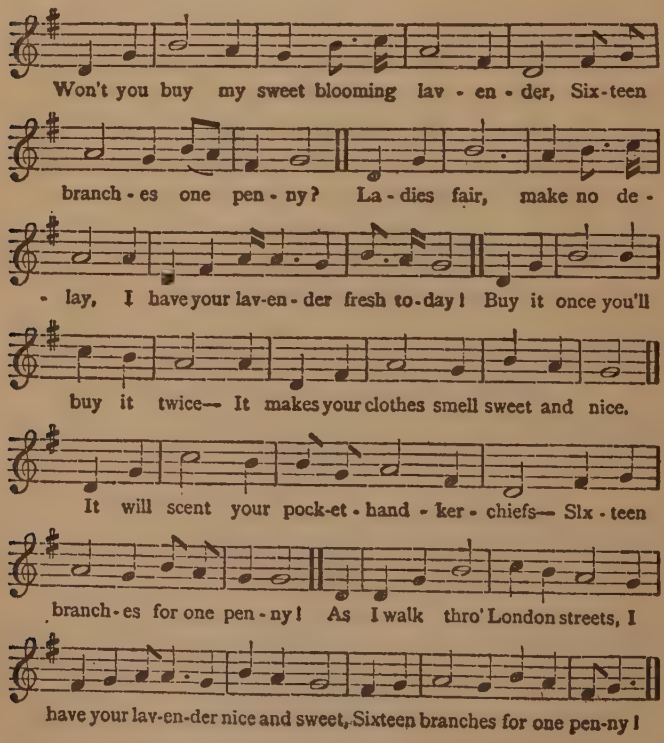
IN WHICH LAVENDER FALCONER ENTERS THIS LIFE AND MEETS WITH GENERAL APPROVAL

AFTER a period of reluctance, in which she very nearly lost all my good opinion, Miss Lavender Falconer entered this vale of tears at the most inconvenient hour possible, namely, at 3.15 A.M. on a rainy morning. My night's rest was ruined; but mother and child at once began to do exceedingly well.

I do not pretend that Lavender was beautiful. She had a crumpled appearance impossible to reconcile with that lissom gracefulness beneath her gown which her proud father some years hence will so value in her; but there was something very attractive in her helplessness — although even at the tender age of twelve hours she was manifestly already a member of the stronger sex. She dominated the room, and still dominates whatever room she may occupy, and promises to continue so to do. So far as I am concerned, I have no objection. I like a strong woman in the background engendering confidence.

Lavender's visitors were many and enthusiastic, and some, like the Magi, brought gifts. Her grandfather placed in each of her tiny fists a new sovereign

by way of laying the foundation of her *dot*, and these she at once allowed to drop on the floor, an action which was held by wise observers to predicate a generous nature. Mr. Lacey made a special visit to Mitcham for lavender and filled the room with it, while the Director produced from his stores of melody this charming old lavender cry:



The Misses Packer were in ecstasies of admiration, although, of course, we did not permit unskilled evidence to turn our heads. Still, they had seen many babies in their time and were entitled to respectful hearing when they indulged in comparison between Lavender and those others.

"Mrs. Harvey's baby, you remember, Emmie," said Miss Laura, "was a picture; but nothing compared with Mrs. Falconer's. There's a something about this little darling — I don't know what it is, but a something — which makes it more remarkable than any I've ever seen."

Miss Emma agreed with her, attempting — I thought hazardously — to discover what the something was, but of course failing.

Mrs. Wiles also came in to worship, and as she gazed grew very tearful. "Adopted children are all very well," she said, "and my Annie's a little pet; but there's nothing like one of your own. Well, well, we can't have everything, and Wiles has just bought a lovely gramophone, and Annie is trying to say 'Daddy' and 'Mammy' quite natural; and the invites that come to us to join committees of charitable societies, with lords and ladies sitting on them too, would make some of our friends go green with envy."

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN WHICH MRS. DUCKIE EMPLOYS AN ANNIHILATING PHRASE WHICH SO RANKLES THAT IT SEEMS ALMOST ABSURD TO GO ON AT ALL

MRS. DUCKIE, whom, after her long speech to me on the duties of husbands, I felt I must acquaint with Lavender's arrival, came up in her best bonnet to see the ladies. She had tea with me afterwards in the sitting-room, the nurse having driven her and her kindly but not too reposeful tongue sternly forth. She said nothing for a minute or two except about Mr. Duckie and the "Gog and Magog Chop House," which is doing famously, thanking me for my share in it; but then, laying down her cup, she uttered quietly, as if speaking of the weather, the most devastating words I ever listened to.

"It's the healthiest baby I ever saw," she said, "and I've seen many. I'm so glad about it. And now you could die to-morrow, Mr. Falconer, if you liked."

Did you ever hear of such a bombshell?

What on earth did she mean? I asked.

"Why," she said, "I often think about it. That's what we're for—to marry and have children. But I

didn't mean to say what I did. It must have sounded dreadful. It just popped out. Still, you're one as understands. You know what a difference there is between a father and a mother — the mothers have all the responsibility."

"All very well," I said, "if one were limited to one child. But am I not needed for more?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Duckie, laughing, "don't worry about that. You'll never have another. Not you! You've got 'one child only' written all over you."

"Then Nature's done with me?" I said as lightly as I could.

"Oh, I dare say you'll live to be eighty, and I hope you will," Mrs. Duckie replied, "such a nice gentleman as you are; but you've — you've ——"

"I've answered her purpose," I suggested bravely.

"Yes," said Mrs. Duckie, without the faintest trace of mercy.

"And what about bringing up — education and so forth?"

"Oh, Mrs. Falconer will do that beautifully," said this vixen. "I couldn't think of a better mother."

I was struck dumb for a while. Here was an attitude for a woman (and one's old landlady too, thus aggravating the offence) to take up to a lord of creation!

"So you don't think husbands are any other use?" I asked at last.

"They bring in the money, of course," she replied, "but that's all. They don't really help with the

children — not most of them don't. A few, yes, but even those very likely are only a bother, when all's said, and in your case there's enough money already."

No need to say that I was glad when she had gone; but when I peeped into Naomi's room and the nurse (who used to be a nice woman) hushed me sternly away, my spirits sank again.

I walked out into Regent's Park and sat down and thought about it. City men in tall hats were hastening home. "Foolish to be in such a hurry," I said; "you're not wanted. Homes are for women. Leave the money for the rent and the butcher and get out again." Nurses and mothers were here and there with their charges. "Ladies," I said, "I salute you. Permit one who could die to-morrow, if he liked, without being missed, to bid you farewell. Not, however, that your reign is much longer than mine — but a little longer. Wait till those babies are of age and see then how much you are needed!" Children were playing all about. "To you," I said, apostrophizing them at large, "is the earth and the fulness thereof. It is for you that all Nature is working, but only that you may work for her, for she does nothing for nothing. In a few years' time you too will be fathers and mothers under sentence, like me. So play on and be happy while you can."

As I was sitting there Lacey came up and joined me. "You look blue," he said — "so am I. It's that infernally beautiful sunset that's done it. Not for nothing did Dürer give his 'Melancholia' the setting

sun. What's the matter? Have you suddenly discovered that your nose is out of joint?" (What an instinct the fellow has!) "Every baby puts someone's nose out of joint; either its father's or mother's or another baby's. But that's all right. That's part of the fun. Life is nothing but readjusting. Lovers are always becoming parents. There's no sense in the world, only movement; but luckily we all have our moments off, and the thing is to get as many of them as possible. That's the principal reason why brewers and distillers are so rich and noble, and why old Furley's films do so well. Anodynes, don't you see; devices for cheating facts. Take me into the Zoo with your powerful autograph and we'll soon forget our troubles. There's a little kinkajou on the right as we go in, with a tail like a boa, who hangs round your neck and drives all griefs away. I dare say, if we only knew, there's a wild animal for every mental malady."

We went in and strolled about for a while: bewaring of pickpockets, according to instructions.

"As a matter of fact," said Lacey, as we sat down in the little pavilion reserved for Fellows and ordered something to drink, "I am miserable too. But then that's about all I expect. I've made such a mess of things. Never mind how, but I have. I get too fond of too many people. Anyway, I called on an old flame of mine to-day who is married — happily married — and it hurt. I ought to have married her myself, but things went wrong. I understood her

and she understood me, but we had no luck. At least perhaps *she* did. We fenced a good deal today, of course. It was the only thing to do. She asked me that inevitable question, What I was doing with my life and going to do? When a happily married woman asks this it means only one thing: it means, When are you going to be happily married too? I said I had no reason to admire marriage sufficiently to think of nothing else.

"'But love?' she asked.

"I admitted that love was all right, and was silent in the idiotic way that one is, at intervals, during such meetings.

"'Well?' she asked after a while.

"'I have nothing to report,' I replied. Nor had I, Heaven knows; yet I should not have mentioned it, even if I had. There is no pleasure in confessing to those who belong to another. She was still charming and beautiful and sympathetic; but sympathy when one comes second is a very different thing from sympathy when one might possibly come first. And then I left the house and, of course, for a while I saw nothing but pretty girls on young fellows' arms, as one always does when one's most lonely and miserable; and then I walked bang into that blighting sunset and then into you."

He said nothing for a while and we watched the passers-by.

"How happy other people can be, confound them!" he said. "And that is why one is never so wretched

as in a crowd. Omar's comparison of life to a game of chess —

> 'But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
> Upon the Chequer-board of Nights and Days;
> Hither and thither moves, and checks, and stays,
> And one by one back in the Closet lays —'

is no doubt true enough to such a pessimistic mind as poor, fastidious, solitary FitzGerald's and those of us to whom the Creator has not given the happy acceptive temperament. But when one hears the stories that London — and I suppose all other towns and cities — has in such numbers, of frustrated affections and loveless marriages and irregular alliances, it is rather as His jig-saw puzzle that one sees life, where the least likely pieces fit together and the most likely can never be joined. Well!"

He got up. "Now I'm going to be jolly again," he said. "Life, with all its bothers and disappointments and disillusions, and even with the circumstance that one has to live it chiefly with that impostor oneself, is too good to run down. There are so many little things to keep one going. Here, for example, see what I found to-day in a West End bookseller's catalogue:

> À Kempis. *Imitation of Christ.* Printed on Real Vellum (only ten copies issued). Illuminated Frontispiece and Illuminated Fronts, and all the initials illuminated. Bound in Cape Levant Morocco Red, tooled in blind design with doublures. £18 18s. net.

There's a first step towards imitating the simple Nazarene! Eighteen guineas for the primer. One has no right to be doleful in a world where things like this happen."

Lacey's revived spirits did me good, and on returning home I found Naomi more sweet than ever before, and even Nan conveyed some of the illusion of pleasure at my approach, although the nurse (who was otherwise her old self again) insisted that the phenomenon was purely the effect of internal disturbance.

Lacey was more right than not. I did not and shall not forget what Mrs. Duckie said, because I know it to be true; but it has already sunk below the surface of memory into that woolly receptacle where so much of the past is preserved. Not often do I bring it out, but it has a way of desiring an airing between four and five A.M. when one's pulse is at its lowest and hope almost non-existent; and I am often conscious of its presence when I watch Naomi and Nan together, or, greatly daring, take Nan into my own hands. Greatly daring! — there you have it again. For Naomi does not greatly dare: she picks up this fragile pink atom as naturally and unthinkingly as a cricketer picks up the ball.

Nan, I must admit, does not help me. Perhaps some day, as I tell her, when she is tall and slender and seventeen, she will be more ready to accompany her grey father than her bonny mother; and then (if I have succeeded in living so long) I shall be in receipt

of a little return for all my services to Nature. But it will be only for a brief season then, for her eyes will be beginning to wander this way and that for the comely form (as she considers it) of another of Nature's dupes, who at this moment is perhaps squealing in another awkward progenitor's arms in some other London nursery. For life, as Lacey says, is all progression, if not progress.

Nan, as I say, gives me no help. There is something about my features, which are not unpleasing to many of my friends, that she finds curiously terrifying; and the more kindly disposed I am to her and beam with tenderness on her little person, the more evidently do I remind her of one of the most fearsome monsters of that mysterious nowhere from which she journeyed hither.

But with her mother . . . ! The two together make such an adorable picture that I wish I could get it painted by a worthy brush. The balance of sex wants readjusting among the representations, both in paint and in stone, of mother and child. For centuries no man of genius ever painted or graved a girl-baby at all: there might not have been such a thing in the world. In fact, if art and not biology were the evidence upon which the historian has to work, there never was a girl-baby until quite recently. It is a great pity, because this preoccupation with the boy-baby has deprived us of renderings of girl-babies which would have been exquisite beyond imagination. Think what adorable little nestling mites Luca della

Robbia could have moulded, and what tiny feminine rogues Correggio would have painted! One wonders that no artist rebelled. Did none of them ever look at a family of children and think the little girls lovely? Or, against their better taste, did they merely slavishly obey tradition?

CHAPTER XXXVII

IN WHICH A TRYING CEREMONY GOES FOR NOTHING, AND A FATHER PUTS DOWN HIS FOOT

DOLLIE and Ann walked in after lunch, looking, as I think now, a shade less natural than usual, but only a shade. Their visit was so remarkable that I wish to record its progress with minute accuracy.

Dollie greeted us with a somewhat piano "Wow, wow!" and sat himself in the most comfortable chair. Ann took a chair by the window and asked how Lavender was, and if she might see her.

Naomi went out to arrange for the display, and Dollie asked if cigarette smoke was bad for it.

I asked what he meant by "it," and he said he meant Lavender, and Ann told him with some asperity that he ought to be more careful in referring to babies. She seemed more critical of him even than usual.

I asked after her father, and she said he had seemed all right at breakfast.

"Better than he'll be at dinner, I guess," Dollie said darkly, and Ann frowned.

After a long silence Dollie said that it had turned colder. He then asked me if I had had any racing tips lately, and I asked him in return how I, moving in the society that I did, could expect to have any. "I go nowhere," I said. "Except to the Zoo. Besides, I don't want tips."

"Why don't you ask the keepers?" he said, and Ann told him not to be absurd.

Naomi, entering with Lavender, made a diversion.

Ann asked if she might hold her and was exceedingly tender, and pretty in her tenderness. Dollie threw away his cigarette, surveyed Lavender minutely through his monocle, and said nothing, but sighed heavily.

Naomi asked Dollie where he was dining that night, and he looked at Ann.

Ann said she was not sure.

I drew Dollie to the window and said, "Well?"

He gripped me by the hand and took out another cigarette, and I guessed that these young hesitants had this morning come at last to grips, and that the day was named, and I was feeling very complacent about my devilish perspicacity when Ann took off her gloves and revealed the newest wedding-ring on earth.

And then, Lavender having been removed, on account of her immaturity, we had the story. These

young idiots had been registered that very morning, and Sir Gaston did not yet know.

"But why weren't you married properly?" Naomi asked.

"Well," said Ann, "we didn't want the fuss of a wedding, and, honestly, I wanted to save father all that trouble and expense."

"But it's so furtive-looking," Naomi said.

"That's all right," said Dollie. "We had witnesses. Farrar was there and Gwen. Farrar signed the book like a good 'un. All straight and above board."

"Yes," said Naomi, "that's all right, I know, but, Ann, think of your grandmother, old Mrs. Ingleside. She would have given everything to be at your wedding. And your mother, Dollie."

"Oh well," said Dollie, "my mother gave me up as a conventional being years ago. She'll be jolly glad I'm settled and done for. That's what she'll say."

"But your sisters? How they would have enjoyed being bridesmaids!"

"Not they," said Dollie; "they've done it too often. Besides, I protest against marrying in order to give one's people enjoyment. That's all out of date. Ann and I wanted to save fuss, and, by Jingo, we've done it!"

"And what is the next move?" I asked.

"Well," said Ann, "we wondered if you would come down to Buckingham Street with us and help with father."

"I like that," I was beginning to say, when, "Of course he will," said Naomi.

Sir Gaston was in when we arrived.

After greeting me, he looked at Dollie and remarked that he had the appearance of one who had backed a loser.

Dollie groaned. "Not so bad as that, I hope," he murmured.

Ann went over to her father and kissed him.

He seemed rather surprised, but merely asked what he had done to receive such an unusual attention.

Ann replied that she felt like it, and I realized that the time had come to stop this drama of reticences and disguised feelings.

"Well, Ingleside," I said, "I must say you take it very much as a matter of course."

"What?" he asked.

"Why, a kiss from a pretty, young, married woman," I said.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, running his keen eyes over Ann and Dollie.

"Yes," I said, "this is Mrs. Adolphus Heathcote. She asked me to introduce her."

"I'm very glad," he said. "Have some cake," and we all mercifully laughed, and the strain snapped.

"But," he said a little later, "we must now fix the date of the wedding."

"We are married," said Ann. "Look at my ring."

"Yes," said her father. "That's all right. But we'll forget that. I can't have my daughter marrying in this hole-and-corner way. Saving trouble and expense is all very well, but there are things more important. One of them is giving my aged mother an opportunity of seeing you at the chancel steps. There are others, too, but that comes first. Now get out an almanack — I'm sure Dollie has a bookmaker's diary in his pocket — and find the earliest date for dresses and so forth, and we'll get it over properly; but until then you must consider yourself still Ann Ingleside."

Dollie looked by no means cheerful as he searched for the diary.

"I'm afraid you're vexed with me?" he said to Sir Gaston.

"Not at all," was the reply. "I should have been, if you hadn't come to me to-day. But your mother and sisters ought to be."

"That's a cert," said Dollie.

"Yes, and there's someone who would have been even more furious than any of them," said Sir Gaston.

"Who?" Dollie asked.

"Your tailor. The idea of trying to evade destiny in this way! If ever there was a man born to be married in new clothes, it is you, and you sneak about London in tweeds trying to find a registrar base enough to be your accomplice. Now, Ann has never been dressy. For Ann it was all right. But you — my dear Dollie, never do anything so out of

character again. It doesn't suit you. Go right off to Savile Row the first thing in the morning and arrange for the war-paint, and Ann, in her own more restricted way, will do the same. Meanwhile, I claim the custody of the ring."

The next evening I chanced to run across Dollie in St. James's Park as I was on my way to Queen Anne's Gate, and he had a smile that irradiated his honest countenance like the sun on the sea. He unfolded an evening paper, and although the breeze defeated his efforts several times, he pronounced no malediction. Evidently Mr. Adolphus Heathcote was in a good temper.

"Look here," he said, "here's a little bit of all right."

I followed the direction of his gloved finger and saw that a horse named Decree Nisi had won a race.

"Wait a bit," he said, moving his finger lower, and I saw that the starting price of Decree Nisi was 20 to 1.

"What do you think of that?" he asked. "Not bad odds?"

"Very good," I said.

"Well," he said, "what do you think I did? After the painful experiences of yesterday I took them as a tip, because, don't you see, I was, in a manner of speaking, jolly well divorced last evening, wasn't I? Very well. I added the cost of the wedding ring — three pounds ten, for it was a downright, solid affair,

as I dare say you noticed — to the cost of the special licence, and put the whole boiling on Decree Nisi. And it romps in at 20 to 1. Never let me hear anyone talk about marriage being unlucky again. Wow, wow!"

CHAPTER THE LAST

IN WHICH FAREWELL IS SAID TO PRIMROSE TERRACE, AND THE EARTH FINDS A NEW AXIS

I WRITE these final words in another house, not too far from Primrose Terrace and our dear Lacey and the Zoo; a house with its own garden. For Lavender could not flourish in the Misses Packers' restricted space, and Lavender is, of course, the principal person to consider. And since it is a house with a garden, and all our own, it follows (in London) that we have no neighbours, and therefore, not having neighbours any more to describe, there is nothing to do but to take my novelist friend's best piece of advice.

Finding the right house was as difficult as ever it is, and was attended by the usual rages as we gazed upon ideal residences already selfishly occupied by other persons; more difficult, indeed, since it was to be the theatre of the dramas of Lavender's infancy, childhood, girlhood, and young womanhood. No joke selecting an historic abode of this kind.

Yet here we are, on our first evening, and Lavender (whose home it so pre-eminently is) has just consented to fall asleep.

The house — but, excuse me, I feel certain I heard her cry.

THE END

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